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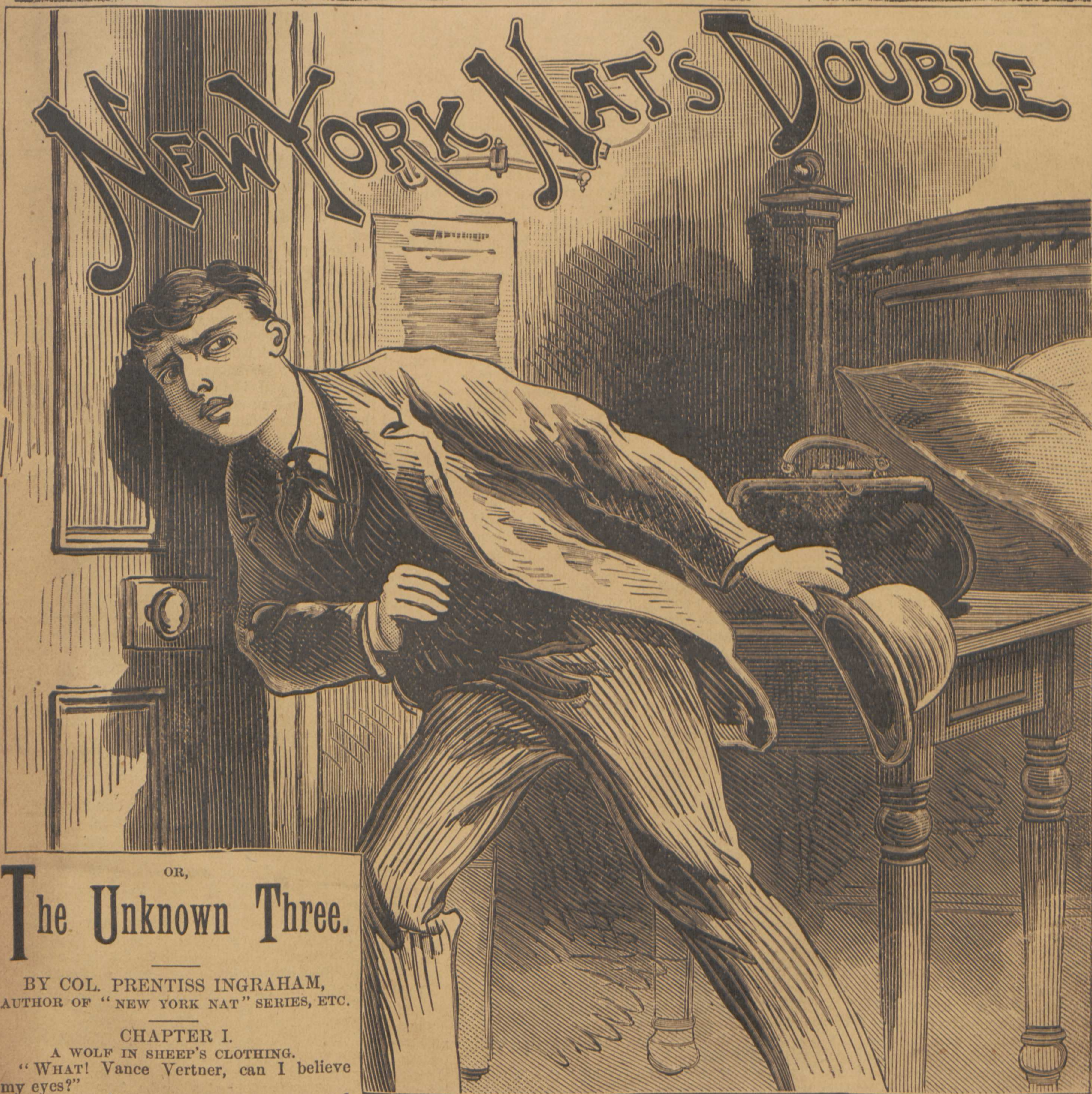
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OR, The Unknown Three.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "NEW YORK NAT" SERIES, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING.

"WHAT! Vance Vertner, can I believe my eyes?"

"One word, one sign to betray me, and you are a dead man!" came the threat in a low tone, and the man addressed as Vance

A DOOR COMMUNICATED WITH NO. 135, THROUGH WHICH NEW YORK NAT
HEARD THE HUM OF VOICES.

Vertner held hard against the throat of the one who had accosted him a small derringer, which he seemed to have had strangely ready for work.

The two men had met in the streets of New York, where one had appeared to recognize the other and addressed him as he did.

"Betray you, old pard, when I am a hunted man myself? But, I see that you do not recognize your old pal, Star Dunning—"

"My God! I thought you dead."

"And perhaps hoped that I was; but I am no more dead than you are hanged, and let me tell you, old friend, that you really deserve the name a paper bestowed upon you as the King of the Gallows, for you have escaped the rope-end dance no less than three times to my certain knowledge."

"Perhaps oftener, if the truth was known; but, 'sh! for see that woman, whom I have not before noticed."

"Old, half-blind and deaf, for I saw her whip out a speaking-trumpet upon a policeman awhile since when she asked him about a cross-town car, and, of course, he raised his voice and shouted in the trumpet in a way that made the back number wince."

"But, I am delighted to meet you, Vance, for you look like a millionaire and can stake me."

"As I have done before. Yes, am ready to do again, though you must earn your pay."

"I'll do it, so long as it is not the knife and pistol act I am engaged for, as I am tired of death-bed scenes."

"The work will be whatever you are told to do, and your pay certain and liberal."

"All right; we'll close; but I am surprised to see you dare come here."

"Risk nothing, gain nothing; and see, I have just found you, Star Dunning, by coming, though I would not have known you, and am surprised that you recognized me in this dress of a clergyman."

"Satan in you shone out through your clothes, Vance, for the lamb's skin did not hide the wolf, at least from me."

"I must be more careful or some renegade detective may spot me, and I have no desire to see the inside of a cell again or sleep under the shadow of the gallows—ah! the old lady is going to address us," and the speaker turned as an old woman with gray hair and a pronounced country garb stepped up, and, gazing benignly through her gold spectacles, said:

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but I make bold to ask you to tell me which car I'm to take to the Christopher Street Ferry where my darter Anne is waitin' me."

"Our folks say as how I shouldn't speak to no naughty New York man, unless it was a perlecceman but, law sakes, I asked one of them and he well nigh bu'sted the drum o' my car a-hollerin' in my trumpet. But, you looks like a gentleman, and I makes bold to ask you, for I'm from Jarsey, you see."

"Yes, madam, I see—ah! you are a trifle deaf," and Vance Vertner spoke in the muzzle of the ear trumpet she held up to him, and continued:

"You do well, my sister, not to speak to the men of this evil city, for most of them go about in sheep's clothing to hide their wolfish nature, and I am myself afraid of the New York police."

"I want to know," said the surprised woman, while, seizing her trumpet, Star Dunning shouted in it:

"That's so, lady; I'm afraid of them myself, and I am so glad you spoke to us, for my christian brother here will direct you, for what he don't know of New York isn't worth knowing. Here comes a Christopher street car now," and the old lady was put upon the car, and somewhat surprised that the conductor would not wait for her to write down her address for the "nice gentlemen."

The car had not gone half a block before she sprung to her feet, saying that she had lost her pocketbook and wished to go back and find it.

"It was your nice gentlemen that took it," grumbled the conductor as he let her off, and he was surprised at the lively pace she took.

Going to a cab at the curb, she sprung in and said:

"Keep those two men in sight without appearing to do so and I'll treble your fare—I mean the clergyman and the one in a light slouch hat."

The cabman promised to do so and mounted his box.

CHAPTER II.

A FERRET'S TRICK.

WITH the promise of so liberal a reward, the cabman, a very cunning fellow in his way, at once set to work to keep the two men in sight, and whose conversation in the street had been so compromising to both of them.

Seen together as they turned into Union Square from University place, they would have been regarded as a clergyman and a country friend, so thoroughly do the crooks of New York make up to appear the very opposite from what they are.

Sauntering leisurely up Broadway, the supposed clergyman bestowing more askant glances upon the pretty girls on that thoroughfare than a man of his cloth is expected to, they continued their way up to Madison Square where Vance Vertner led the way into a fashionable hotel.

Approaching the office he asked for his key, and said to the polite clerk:

"My friend, Mr. Starbuck, is going to remain in town one night, so kindly assign him to a room next to mine, if you please, and as my guest."

"Certainly, Doctor Elliott," responded the clerk, and giving to his friend, who registered as "Daniel Starbuck, of New Jersey, the key of an adjoining room, the gentlemanly assistant in the office wrote upon a slip of paper, which he put in the cashier's drawer:

"Charge Rev. Dr. Van Elliott, Room 135 with bill of gent in Room 137."

As the clerk turned from this duty, he flashed the diamond "headlight" in his scarf into the face of a handsome youth who just then approached the office.

The said youth had just alighted from a cab at the door of the hotel, and turning to the cabman had handed him three crisp one-dollar bills with the remark:

"Here is the treble fare the old lady promised you."

"My God!" was the ejaculation of the man, and he turned slightly pale and stammered:

"But, where is the old gal?"

"Oh! she got out when I took her place."

"It's all right, cabby, and mum's the word. Ta-ta!"

And the youth, with a grip-sack in his hand, strolled into the hotel, seemingly amused at the bewildered manner in which the cabman looked at him, before tightening his reins and driving away.

"Pardon me, sir, but was not that the Reverend Mr. Dash of Boston, who just walked over to the elevator?" asked the youth, politely.

"No, it was the Reverend Doctor Van Elliott, of Ohio."

"Oh, you mistake the one I mean. I referred to the gentleman with the Reverend Doctor Elliott."

The clerk glanced at the book, and replied:

"He is a friend of the Reverend Doctor Elliott, and registered as Mr. Daniel Starbuck, of New Jersey; but, will you register, sir?"

"Yes, for the night," and the youth took the pen handed to him and wrote:

"NATHANIEL NORTON,

"New Haven."

"A Yale student, I'll bet drinks on it, and it's lucky there are not two, for the Reverend Elliott would be entertained to-night with their orgies, as I have put him in the next room," said the clerk to the cashier, and stepping back, with a key in his hand, he called out:

"Front, show the gentleman to-one-thirty-three."

The youth followed the boy up to the room, dismissed him with a quarter, and smiled in a pleased sort of way, as he saw that there was a door communicating with 135, and through which he heard the hum of voices talking in a low tone.

Seating himself by the table he took up his grip with the remark:

"I must put this in shape and lock it, for I did not have time in the cab."

Pouring the contents out upon the table, the grip was seen to be made of thin leather, drawn tightly over a steel frame which could be so closed and refolded that the whole contrivance could be carried in one's pocket.

The contents consisted of a black dress of ancient pattern, a shawl, bonnet, black veil, pair of thick ladies' shoes, a quilted skirt, wig of gray hair, pair of spectacles, reticule of ancient date, gloves and a belt.

In addition to these, there were a bottle of bay rum, a box of face powder and a towel.

All were folded neatly and replaced in the valise.

Then the youth arose and tried to get a look through some crack in the door, into the adjoining room, but this he was unable to do, and so muttered:

"They are safe, so I will go up to the old mansion, for to-night the boys will assemble. They must be put on the track of the man who was called Vance Vertner, but known as the King of the Gallows among his confederates. I must look up his record, and that of Star Dunning, too, for I am sure these are their right names, and that they have been pards in crime before, for it is evident they are now plotting deviltry."

"But, whatever they are up to, they'll find New York Nat on their trail."

With this the youth left the room and the hotel.

CHAPTER III.

NEW YORK NAT'S ALLIES.

WHEN the youth, who had so cleverly played the ferret, and, though speaking of himself as New York Nat, registering upon the hotel books as Nathaniel Norton, left the hotel, he took a Broadway car up one of the fashionable up-town streets, and ascending the brown stone steps of an elegant mansion entered with a pass-key which he selected from a bunch he had in his pocket, and every one of which had a peculiar tag attached to it.

Walking to the rear of the handsomely-furnished mansion, he entered the door of a large, rear extension, wherein a gentleman sat reading the afternoon papers.

He was a young man with a handsome face, blond mustache, and blue eyes, that were very expressive.

Attired in gown and slippers, he was taking it easy in a comfortable chair.

"Ah, Nat, it is you, is it? Sit down and tell me what that clever brain of yours is plotting now," the young man urged.

"I have news for you, Mr. Canfield,* and, as usual, I come to you for your help."

"Always command me, Nat. You know I am yours on call."

* Sherman Canfield, of Nebraska, for a long time the pard, and later, the private secretary of Colonel W. F. Cody, Buffalo Bill. THE AUTHOR.

"I feel that I can rely on you, sir, for ever since you came to New York as the ally of my old friend, Mr. Vanderlip, you have fully taken his place. I do not know what I would have done but for your aid, and to have this elegant bachelor home as my quarters."

"You have most effectually been the shield that has protected me from the police and city detectives, and allowed me and my Boy Ferrets to be unknown Secret Service agents, and to do our work in a secret manner as suited us, until in our own good time we choose to throw off the mask of secrecy and allow the chief of the bureau to know us as we are, and just what we have done, which, but for you, we could not have accomplished, by half."

"Well, Nat, after this most flattering speech do you want me to return the compliment, and tell you that I consider you the shrewdest and cleverest detective in New York?"

"You are really but a boy, in years, and yet, with the aid of your beautiful sister and Boy Police you have accomplished wonders."

"You have eluded the police and detectives at every point, and as Unknown Ferrets, communicating through me with the chief of the Secret Service, you have secretly achieved wonders in ferreting out villainy and in running down crooks. Why, you even went out to the Wild West on a trail of criminals and there unearthed most mysterious wrongs and crimes."

"Your own sister, Olive, your most ably, is not even known to your own band of Boy Police, as she successfully conceals her identity from them. It is best that she does so, not to be known in the future, and is only now known as the Mascot of the Ferrets of the Haunted House."

"As for you I—"

"I beg you to take a breathing spell, Mr. Canfield, for you have more than returned the compliment, which was due to you after all that you had done for me."

"Well, Nat, I am glad we are even, as far as compliments go; so now fire away at the target and let me know what I can do for you at this juncture."

"Well, sir, as I was playing in disguise this afternoon, to catch some counterfeiters, I happened to overhear a conversation between two men who accidentally met near me on the street."

"They are both crooks, fugitives from justice, escaped from prison, and one of them has dodged hanging so often that he is known as the King of the Gallows."

"Indeed? You are in luck, in striking such a lead."

"I have the men spotted, Mr. Canfield. I shadowed them to their hotel, and have secured the next room to them."

"Here are their names, their real ones, I am sure. I am anxious to know just what you can find out about their records."

"I will go at once to the chief, Nat, and ascertain, for I have time before dinner."

"Thank you, sir. I will drop in to see you in the morning and get the report. There is a meeting of the Ferret clan to-night, and I am now going up to dine with my sister and escort her to the meeting."

"She is not afraid to go to that old rookery alone, Nat?"

"Oh, no; Olive is afraid of nothing."

"Nor are you, for though I am not superstitious, I would not sleep alone in that old mansion as you do."

"It is safest, sir, for a haunted house, as they call it, and with a graveyard back of it, no one ever comes there, knowing its history of murders committed beneath its roof."

"But, I must be off, sir," and New York Nat left the mansion, took an Elevated car for up-town, and entered a pretty cottage upon the banks of the Hudson, a beautiful young girl meeting him at the door.

Just after nightfall he came out of the cot-

tage, accompanied by the same young girl closely veiled, and, rapidly walking a few blocks, they came to the overgrown grounds of a large and long-deserted old residence, rapidly crumbling to decay.

That part of the city was very thinly peopled, and no one was abroad to see them scale the wall and enter the grounds, and soon after to pass into the mansion through the cellar door.

Nat found a lantern lighted in the cellar, and then, as they entered, a nice dog came forward to greet them.

"The Boy Police have arrived, Olive," said New York Nat, and the two ascended to the top floor, where, in a large room, on benches facing a table, behind which were two chairs, sat some two-score boys, ranging from twelve to twenty years of age, and dressed in any conceivable fashion, from bootblack to dude.

All arose as their young chief and the Mascot Queen appeared, and going to the chairs behind the table, they seated themselves.

The council of Unknown Ferrets was then called to order, it being seen, as Olive threw her wraps and veil off, that she wore a close-fitting wire mask.

CHAPTER IV.

THE "KING OF THE GALLOWES."

HAVING introduced New York Nat and his secret allies, his Unknown Ferrets, to the reader, there is no need now to speak of the council held every night in the young chief's quarters at the Haunted House; but we proceed at once to state that the next day the appointment was kept with Nat's go-between, Sherman Canfield.

"Well, Nat, I have good news for you, and it is well that you have your men spotted, for there is money in them," announced Mr. Canfield, taking his note-book from his pocket and opening it.

"Yes, sir; one of them has money, for he stole my fake pocketbook yesterday, which I held so as to tempt him," and Nat laughed merrily.

"He swiped it as he helped me upon the car, but it had only counterfeit money in it, being a fake, as I said, to tempt pocketbook snatchers!"

"But, you found the record of the slippery pair, then?"

"Yes, and an unsavory one it is, while there are rewards amounting to two thousand dollars on the head of this so-called King of the Gallows, and a thousand on the other fellow known as Star Dunning."

"Good! we must add that to our Boy Police bank account! Why, the Ferrets are getting rich, Mr. Canfield—rich as stock brokers on a rise!"

"As they deserve to, considering the big risks they take, and the work they do."

"But, listen to this, for I jotted it down as the Secret Service chief read it to me," and Sherman Canfield continued, reading from his note-book:

"Vance Vertner, native of S—, New York State, thirty-five years of age, six feet tall, weighs one hundred and eighty pounds, hair dark brown and wears Burnside whiskers, eyes dark, and features handsome, with perfect teeth, voice clear and speaks rapidly."

"Was born rich, but squandered his own fortune, and ruined his father, who was a banker."

"Loved a young lady of S— who married his rival, Bernard Gaston, who went to the bad, entering a bank at night where he was a clerk, to rob it and hide certain speculations, and killing the watchman who surprised him."

"Sentenced to die on the gallows, Bernard Gaston escaped through the aid of his wife, and has not since been heard of."

"Vance Vertner was found to be the pal of Bernard Gaston in the bank robbery and murder, after the flight of the latter, and was also sentenced to death on the gallows; but he, too, escaped."

"Came to New York and boldly went into business; enticed a rich customer into his office and robbed and killed him, and escaped; but was run down, caught, and after short trial was sentenced to the gallows."

"Was recognized after trial as Vance Vertner, already sentenced, but again most mysteriously escaped, and for several years was not spotted or located."

"Next heard of in Chicago, where he practiced as a physician, and played the game of enticing rich people to his office and robbing them, several times committing murder to do so."

"Was detected, tried, and again sentenced to be hanged; but once more escaped in the same mysterious manner as before, and then became known as the King of the Gallows."

"He was discovered in Chicago to be Vance Vertner, under an alias, and everywhere the papers referred to him as the King of the Gallows, having three times escaped it when three times sentenced."

"His whereabouts now unknown, and there now are rewards out for his capture amounting to ten thousand dollars."

"Is well educated, speaks several languages, studied law, got a diploma as a physician, and is a skilled mechanic, while he is an adept at disguises."

"Well, that indeed is a record, Mr. Canfield. He has well won the name of the King of the Gallows," said Nat.

"I should say so; but now to his pal's record, Star Dunning."

"Yes, sir."

"He was a boy companion of Vertner's, has blond hair, blue eyes, is about five feet ten in height, and weighs one hundred and seventy."

"That describes him, sir."

"He was arrested," and Canfield was reading from his note-book, "for complicity in the bank robbery and murder, with Gaston and Vertner, and was sentenced to prison for ten years; but he escaped."

"Under an assumed name he was Vertner's pal here in New York, but managed to elude the police and got safely away. He was implicated, a year after, in holding up a train and robbing the Express box; was captured and sent to prison for six years, and served his term. Whereabouts now unknown, but the reward for him on former escape holds good."

"Well, we know where he is, and the Reverend Doctor Van Elliott and Mr. Daniel Starbuck must be run in and the rewards won," announced New York Nat, with business-like decision.

"Yes, of course; and can I help you?"

"I do not know yet, sir, for I have got to reconnoiter and find out the best way to capture them secretly."

Nat left the house and went direct to the hotel.

There he met Foxey, one of his boys, who came up to him with a peculiar look on his shrewd face, for he said in a low tone:

"Lordy, chief, is this you or your ghost?"

"It's myself, in good flesh and blood, Foxey!"

"Then you've got a Double, New York Nat, for I saw you, as I thought, get into a carriage not two minutes ago and drive off," declared Foxey.

CHAPTER V.

NEW YORK NAT'S DOUBLE.

NAT knew that Foxey was not one to joke with him, or to say what was not so, and he said:

"So you saw my Double, or my ghost, Foxey?"

"I certainly did."

"Describe him?"

"Well, I came here to keep the appointment with you, and suddenly I saw a young man I thought was you, but, as he passed me without seeing me, or signaling me, I thought something was up that you did not wish me to speak to you."

"So I fell back, and I saw your Double go up to the hotel office, and soon after he passed out with a grip in his hand. Though I stood right by him, he saw me but did not speak, or make a sign, as I said, and I kept still. I saw him get into a cab, heard him tell the driver where to drive, but did not catch what he said, and saw the cab roll away."

"I watched it, thinking it strange you had given no sign, and turning around I saw you."

"Did he look like me?"

"He was your image in size, face and way of walking."

"How dressed?"

"Just as you are."

"That is strange."

"It really scared me when I turned and saw you, chief."

"You did not catch the address he gave the driver?"

"No."

"Was it a hotel cab, or one he had picked up?"

"It was a hotel cab."

"You would know it again?"

"I would know the driver."

"Then keep on the watch here for his return and find out where he took my Double."

"But I forgot to tell you that the letters on his grip were N. Y. N."

"Ah! that is strange indeed. What kind of a grip was it?"

"A small one, of yellow leather, I thought."

"And N. Y. N. on it?"

"Yes; on the side."

"It may be a coincidence, an accident, or it may be that I am being shadowed, Foxy?"

"If so, you want to change your looks."

"Yes, and will, though I hate disguises; but, I must not be shadowed. I want Flip—where is he?"

"Sitting over yonder in the Park, waiting to see if you want him."

"Go over and tell him to come and shadow me, watching if any one else appears to do so, and to follow me up-stairs."

"I will."

"How is Flip dressed?"

"Like a dandy dude?"

"Then he is all right. He can go up in the same elevator with me, but not appear to know me, and come afterwards to room one thirty-three."

"I understand."

"And you wait here for the coming back of that driver?"

"I will," and Foxy, a bright youth of eighteen, well dressed and with the careless swagger of a young man of leisure, sauntered across the street and joined a young swell there who was smoking a cigarette, and watching the passers by with an assumed vacant look upon his face.

He was togged like a dude, carried a large headed cane, wore a collar large enough for a cuff, and wore eye-glasses.

"Say, Flip, you are wanted to shadow the captain and see if he is watched."

"There he stands over there by the hotel. You are to follow him up-stairs, but not to know him, and go to room one-thirty-three."

"What's up, Foxy?"

"The cap'n's got a Double."

"No!"

"Fact, for I saw him. Now I must get back, I'm on the watch," and Foxy walked away and took a stand where he could watch the return of the cab, while Flip

walked over to the hotel and followed New York Nat into it.

The latter walked about for a few minutes and seeing Flip shadowing him, went into the reading-room, wrote a letter, and approaching the office bought a stamp.

Then he asked the clerk for his bill.

It was the same clerk that had been there the day before when he registered, and he looked at Nat in a queer sort of way, and said:

"Why, you just settled your bill, Mr. Norton."

"I paid my bill?" asked Nat, in surprise.

"You did, sir, not fifteen minutes ago."

"To whom?"

"The cashier."

"You are mistaken, sir."

The clerk winked, as though he knew the Yale student, as he supposed him to be, had been imbibing, and said:

"You have forgotten, Mr. Norton. You came to me, called for your bill, turned to the cashier, settled it, and asked for a cab and one was ordered. You had your grip in hand and left the hotel."

"No, sir, you have gotten me mixed with some one else."

"Did not Mr. Norton pay his bill, Spotts?" and the clerk called out impatiently to the cashier, who answered:

"Yes, room one-thirty-nine, arrived last night—supper, lodging, and breakfast three dollars."

"My dear sir, my room is one hundred and thirty-three. I arrived yesterday afternoon, and my valise is there, for the key I have here, as you see, having gone out last night, and did not return till just now."

"You gentlemen simply have gotten me mixed up with some other guest."

"Then you have got a Double!" said the clerk, impetuously.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW YORK NAT'S SHADOWERS.

"AND your Double has got your name, too, for it is Norton," the cashier of the hotel said, as he glanced over the books, and added:

"Yes, you came in yesterday afternoon; and, see here, Spotts—look at these two names registered."

Both clerks were now deeply interested in Nat and his Double, and glancing at the book they read the two names.

To a wonderful extent they were similar, and both were written in back hand, and read:

"NATHANIEL NORTON,

"New Haven, Conn."

and

"N. NORTON,

"Conn."

"It's beyond me," said the cashier.

"Me too," said the gentleman with the head-light diamond.

"It is simply a very strange coincidence," remarked Nat coolly.

"But they say it is bad luck to have a Double," the cashier ventured.

"Yes, my old grandmother used to say it was a pretty sure sign of death," the clerk rejoined.

"Well, gentlemen, having a double being like another person with all the people in this world, does not surprise me, though I would like to meet him and see just how handsome I am," and Nat turned away and walked toward the elevator, while clerk Spotts said:

"A cool young cove, that."

"Very; but he is a handsome fellow with an uncommon face, and yet the one who settled this bill was the image of him. Yes, and dressed as he does."

"I'll dream of this to-night and have the nightmare sure."

"Yes, you generally do after midnight suppers of lobster salad and a bottle of Bass," was the reply of the clerk, and he turned to serve new arrivals, while Nat entered the elevator, Flip, his shadower, doing the same, though apparently with no thought for any one in the world save himself, to judge by the vacant stare upon his face.

Reaching his room, New York Nat entered and found all just as he had left it the day before.

There was his valise on a chair, and the room had evidently not even been disturbed by the chambermaid, when she found that the bed had not been slept in.

Nat had been but a few minutes in the room when the door opened softly and Flip entered.

"No one saw me come in, chief," he whispered.

"All right."

"Did you see any one watching me when I was down stairs?"

"I did not."

"You did not see my Double?"

"I guess I did, if it was the one who drove away in the cab, but I thought it was you, though I saw you from some distance off."

"Saw him, you mean?"

"Yes, cap'n; but he's your Double and no mistake."

"All right. I must run him down and find out if it is an accident or design."

"To do so I must stay at this hotel, and you also must stop here; so go off and get Keno, and the two of you put up here."

"We'll do it."

"But you must not be known to each other."

"Get grips and then register here, and let me know your separate rooms, for I will keep this one."

"You are to shadow me, remember, and keep an eye out for my Double, and track him once you find him."

"But how'll we know whether it is you or your Double?"

"The resemblance will have to be striking for you not to know that; but I'll make sure of it and wear a carnation in my button-hole every day, remember, a white carnation and no other flower."

"I'll not forget."

"Now go, and come back as soon as you get a grip and have posted Keno."

"I won't be long, cap'n," assured Flip, and Nat having glanced out of his door into the hall and seen that no one was there, his fellow Ferret left the room.

Soon after Nat heard the door of the next room open and some one entered.

Whoever it was paced to and fro, as though in deep thought, and Nat sat down by the door and listened attentively.

At last the occupant of the adjoining room seemed to be so deep in thought that his meditations found vent in words, as he suddenly came out with:

"By Heaven, I must trust him, for he will be true to his own interests."

Again there was a silence of some minutes and the words were uttered aloud:

"Delays are dangerous, and I must act at the earliest moment possible, for there is too much at stake if I am successful, and to be recognized means another fight against the gallows."

New York Nat smiled grimly as he heard the words, there came a knock at the door of the next room, and some one entered.

But what was said Nat could not hear as the conversation was in a whisper.

Soon after the men left the room, and going down to the office, Nat saw Foxy, who gave him a sign to follow him. He did so, going out into the Park near the hotel.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT MYSTERIOUS DOUBLE.

"WELL, Foxey, you have news for me?" said Nat as he joined the Ferret in the Park.

"I have, Nat, and I guess the fellow is onto you."

"My Double?"

"That same."

"You saw the driver?"

"I did."

"What did he say?"

"Well, I braced him when I saw him come back on the stand, and asked him who the cove was he drove away."

"He at once asked me if I knew him, and I said that I did, and we was on the same game."

"I could see that the man had something to tell, so I slipped a two dollar bill into his hand and said:

"Now you can tell me what word he left with you?"

"Well?"

"He seemed to at once think I was the fellow's pal, for he said:

"Well, maybe you'll understand better than I do, but he stopped at a down-town bar-room and gave me a two dollar-bill telling me to go in and buy him some cigars."

"I went, leaving him in the cab, and when I came back he was not there, but this was pinned upon the seat, and the cabman showed me a slip of paper upon which was written:

"Keep the cigars and change for your fare."

"I am a detective, so if you are asked at the hotel where you drove me, say to the Christopher Street Ferry."

"Then he did not leave town, Foxey?"

"I guess not."

"He is a detective, he says, and left the cab in that mysterious way."

"Well, as you say, he must be shadowing me, and I'll have to change my rig."

"Now, Foxey, you make friends with that cabman and tell him to keep an eye out for my Double, and you be on duty outside of the hotel."

"If you have to find me, my room is one-thirty-three. Flip and Keno will also be stopping there to shadow me and see if I am noticed."

"I understand, cap'n."

"I will go up to the rookery and change my clothes and make-up, or rather bring another rig down to the hotel with me, to change there, if I have to."

"Better change, cap'n, for you are certainly being shadowed, and by one who is your very Double, as you now appear."

"Yes, and I'll post the Queen of my having a Double, and also our friend and ally who serves us so well."

"Now, as it is getting late, I will go to the Rookery," and New York Nat walked away, more impressed with the fact that he surely had a Double, and one who said he was a detective, than he cared to admit.

"After so cleverly concealing the identity of the Boy Ferrets for so long, and mystifying the chief of the Secret Service as to who his Unknown Detectives are, can it be possible that the secret is known, and we are really to be unmasked?" said Nat, to himself, as he walked along up-town.

Going first to the home of Sherman Canfield he acquainted him with the fact that he had a Double, and the mysterious behavior of his impersonator with the cabman.

"Well, Nat, we must run him down, and that you can do. I will drop in at the hotel this evening, and ask for this mysterious Double of yours, Mr. N. Norton, of Connecticut," said Sherman Canfield.

"I wish you would, sir, and I'll put Olive on the track, too, and if he outwits us all,

why the Boy Ferrets, their chief and Mascot Queen are simply no good," answered Nat, and he soon after left the house and took the Elevated cars for the cottage where his sister Olive lived.

The Mascot Queen always had a warm welcome for her brother, and after the two had had dinner, for Nat often took his meals at the cottage, he told her of his mysterious Double.

Olive was decidedly worried at what she had heard, and at once said:

"I'll shadow him, too, Nat, and go to the hotel to-morrow, so you'll find me there as Mrs. Olivia Chandler, of Quebec, and I'll make up as a dear old lady, and maid, for when not Mrs. Chandler, I'll be Olive, the maid, and see what I can discover, but I advise you not to disguise yourself, but remain as you are, for if your Double is shadowing you he must have you to shadow, and the boys and myself will shadow him."

"You are right, Olive, as you always are, and I'll remain as I am, especially as I am there to shadow two men who are as great scamps as ever went unhung."

After a long talk with Olive, Nat took his leave, went to the old mansion he made his retreat, and packing a large valise with disguises, to have ready in case he should need them, started to the hotel.

It was late when he arrived, and he went straight to his room, and sauntered down to breakfast about nine o'clock, to have Flip pass by him with a peculiar look on his face.

"It's all right, Flip. I'm Nat."

"Good! I didn't see your pink, as promised; but your Double was here last night, and dogged me, unless it was you."

"No, I was not here."

"Then it was your Double."

"I'll look at the register—come to my room in an hour," and Nat passed on into the breakfast-room."

CHAPTER VIII.

A FERRET'S HONOR.

No matter what was upon his mind to worry him, Nat never neglected taking care of himself, and he went in to breakfast with the appetite of one in perfect health.

He saw the head waiter glance at him in a peculiar way, as he showed him to his seat, and the one who took his order said:

"You want another breakfast, sir, just like the one I brought you before?"

"When?"

"Half an hour ago."

"You mean to say that you brought me breakfast half an hour ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"I guess not."

"Maybe it was your twin brother, sir," said the waiter.

"Perhaps so."

"How did he look?"

"Just like you, sir."

"Clothes and all?"

"Yes, sir, and you—I mean he gave me fifty cents fee."

"Ah!" said Nat when given this hint.

"Well, my twin brother does not do my eating, so you will bring me a good breakfast, if you want the fee duplicated."

The waiter hurried off, and Nat felt that his Double was indeed like him, and that he must be quickly found out as to who he was and what it all meant.

Finishing a hearty breakfast, he went down to the office, where Foxey came near him but did not speak.

"Ah! I must secure the pink for my buttonhole, Foxey," said Nat.

"Then it's you?"

"Yes."

"I thought it must be, for your Double went out awhile ago, with Keno shadowing him."

"I'll go to the florist's and get the pink, Foxey, and come to my room after awhile," and Nat passed on.

He soon entered with a pink in his buttonhole, and as he went near the office the clerk called out:

"A letter for you, Mr. Norton."

Nat took the letter, glanced at it, and saw that it was mailed from an out of town point.

He knew that it was not intended for him, for there was no one to write to him there except Olive, and her letter would have been mailed in the city.

The letter was for his Double he knew, and the temptation was strong within him to open it.

But, New York Nat was the soul of honor. He had never done a mean act knowingly, and he would not gain information regarding his Double by breaking the law.

Many bold acts he had been found to do in the work he followed, but he had tried always to be on the right side.

So, as these thoughts rushed rapidly through his mind, he handed the letter back to the clerk and said with a smile:

"I am expecting no mail, sir, and this letter is doubtless intended for my Double and namesake, who must have returned to the hotel."

"Ah, yes; he returned last night and I mistook him for you, and then told him that he had a Double, and who was also his namesake."

"He seemed surprised, and wanted me to point you out to him."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; but I am getting on to the racket, Mr. Norton."

"How is that, sir?"

"Well, I'm a close reader of human nature, you know, and can see that you and the other Mr. Norton are twin brothers and are Yale students, down in New York for a lark—see?"

"Yes."

"You are having your fun in mystifying everybody, and yet I see through it all."

"So you do; but, don't give it away, for you are alone in the secret," whispered Nat, and with a wink he turned away and sauntered up to the ladies' parlor.

He glanced in and was turning away when an elderly lady called out to him:

"Did you kindly ascertain for me, sir, about my trunk?"

Nat saw a lady dressed in black, slightly stooped in the shoulders, and wearing a lace cap, gold spectacles, and with gray hair.

She looked like a lady of sixty in good circumstances.

"I beg pardon, madam, but you did not ask me to see about your trunk."

"Yes, sir, an hour ago, when I met you in the hall."

"No, it was not I."

"Then it must have been your twin brother, or ghost, sir, for my eyes are pretty good, yet."

"Doubtless my twin brother, madam, but I will gladly see about your trunk for you."

"No, it is no doubt in my room now, Nat."

"Olive!"

"Sure, but I saw your Double and so spoke to him about my trunk."

"He is the exact image of you, Nat, even at close scrutiny."

"And I had a chance to ferret out who he was by opening a letter I knew was for him."

"But of course you could not, Nat, as, though a detective, you have honor, and if a spy on other people, you need not be dishonorable."

"No, Olive: when I have to act dishonorably to be a detective, I will give up Secret Service work," and Nat turned as he saw that there was some cause of excitement in the hotel.

CHAPTER IX.

A MYSTERIOUS MURDER.

THERE was some cause of excitement in the hotel, that was certain, for the chambermaids had a scared look, and the servants were running about in great haste.

"There has something gone wrong, Olive, and I will see what it is."

"Remain in the parlor, and I will be back soon," said Nat.

"I will; but what of the two men you are shadowing?"

"The boys are here for instant use, as soon as they are needed, but this Double of mine has almost driven the real cause of our coming here out of my mind."

"I did not see my men last night, but heard them in the room next to me, and I have failed to find them this morning."

"I hope they have not gone, Nat."

"I trust not; but I'll go and find out what the rumpus is now, for something scares the servants."

Leaving Olive, in the disguise of an old lady, in the parlor, Nat hastened down below and at once saw that something had gone wrong.

The clerk looked composed, but his face was pale, and the proprietor was in his office talking with a gentleman whom Nat recognized as the Secret Service chief.

There was a third person present, and as he turned his head Nat was surprised and somewhat startled to see that it was his faithful friend and ally Mr. Sherman Canfield.

"Something has surely gone wrong," muttered Nat and walking up to the desk he said:

"I have been expecting my step-mother to come to New York, and would like to ask if you could give her the adjoining room to mine, one-thirty-five, sir?"

The clerk glanced over the list of rooms and said:

"Yes, Mr. Norton, for one-thirty-five is vacant now, was vacated last night by Rev. Doctor Van Elliott."

"The doctor has gone then?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am sorry I did not see him before he left."

"He was called away suddenly, by a telegram giving information of illness in his family."

"And has his friend, Mr. Starbuck left also?"

"Yes, they left together, and I was thinking if you would not like to have your Double in one-thirty-five?" said the clerk with a smile.

"I should like to see him, for I have not been able to do so; but you can keep the room adjoining me for my step-mother, Mrs. Olivia Chandler, as she will certainly arrive this morning."

"Mrs. Olivia Chandler," said the clerk, glancing over the books:

"An elderly lady and maid—she is here now, sir, in Room One Hundred."

"Indeed! I am glad to know this, and will go up at once," and Nat hastened away and going up to the parlor met Olive again and the two went to her room.

"There's trouble of some kind on hand, Olive, for the Secret Service chief is down in the private office of the proprietor, and Mr. Canfield is with him."

"I chinned the clerk for more time while I watched them and tried to catch what was said, but could not."

"I played step-son to you, and will have your room changed next to mine, for, worst of all, those two devils have gone, and, somehow I believe they are connected with the rumpus in the hotel, whatever it is."

"Now I'll go down and see to it," and Nat hastened away and again approached the clerk and said:

"My mother will change her room next to mine, sir."

"Had you not better change next to her room, sir, as she is an old lady, and one-thirty-five has not been put in order yet," and the clerk had an eye to business, as the rooms on the floor where Olive was were two dollars a day more.

"I'll look at the room next to mine, and he went up in the elevator with Flip, who got out at his floor and whispered:

"There's trouble in the hotel, though they are trying to keep it quiet. Foxey is nosing around, and Keno has not returned."

"All right; keep your eye on me and see what room I change to," and Nat went into the room vacated by the man who had eluded him.

The bed had been moved, but not slept in, and the door was open between that and the adjoining room.

There was nothing but a slip of paper left behind, and on that was some writing and Nat put it in his pocket.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon a sparkling object on the floor, and this he took up, looked at it for a moment, and thrust it into his pocket also.

As he passed out of the room he met Flip in the corridor.

"I'm onto the trouble—there has been a mysterious murder committed in the hotel, Nat," whispered Ferret Flip to New York Nat.

CHAPTER X.

THE CRIME.

"A MURDER committed?" quickly uttered Nat, when he had heard Flip's whispered words.

"Yes, and on this floor."

"I'll try and find out more."

The two parted and Nat mused to himself half aloud:

"And I know who the murderers are!"

"But, what has Mr. Canfield to do with it?"

Not able to answer this question he went to the office and said to the clerk:

"I guess I'll change my room, rather than have my step-mother go two flights further up."

"All right, Mr. Norton; but those rooms are higher priced, you know."

"Yes, I supposed so, as the lower the floor the higher the price. But, that is all right, for the old lady's rich," and Nat and the clerk laughed.

While the change was being made Nat took notice that the Secret Service chief, the landlord and Mr. Canfield had left the office.

He went up to his floor again and got his things ready to be moved, and in the corridor met the three men who had just left a room further along.

He kept on down in the elevator with them to the parlor floor, neither he or Sherman Canfield showing the slightest sign of recognition, and he saw the chief pass out and part on the pavement with his ally, who glanced around, saw Nat, and then started up-town.

Nat hastily returned to the hotel, went to his room and found that it adjoined the parlor which Olive had next to her room, and his things had been placed there.

"Olive, there has been a murder in the house, and Flip knows that I have changed my room, so will be here, for I will go on after Mr. Canfield, who signaled me to do so."

"You can close the door and not be seen by the boys," and Nat hastened away.

Springing into a cab he drove rapidly up-town to the house of Walter Vanderlip, where Sherman Canfield resided, and entering with his pass-key was soon in the presence of his ally.

"I was waiting for you, Nat."

"I saw you with the chief, sir, and the

landlord, and was a little startled, as there had been a murder in the hotel."

"Yes, but you know about it then?"

"Flip is on watch there and found it out."

"They are trying to keep it as a dead secret, but of course it will out."

"I was in the chief's quarters when a telephone came from the hotel asking him to come up immediately, and he asked me to accompany him, for he calls me his 'Connecting Link Man' now, as I am the go-between for your Unknown Ferrets."

"I naturally thought of your two men you were shadowing, and gladly accompanied him, and so am of course posted."

"Well, sir, see how near right I can guess."

"Fire away, Nat."

"Some rich man in the hotel was murdered and robbed last night, but there is no clue to those who did the deed."

"Yes; there is not the slightest clue, and the chief has gone to put a dozen of his best men on the case at once."

"They will do no good."

"What do you know, Nat?"

"I am sure that the Reverend Elliott and his pal are the murderers, Mr. Canfield," replied New York Nat, firmly.

"You have some clue?"

"Only that those two men went to the hotel for a purpose and accomplished it."

"And escaped?"

"So far, yes, sir, but I cannot believe they are not to be run to earth."

"You are the one to do it, Nat, you and your Ferrets."

"Will you tell me what particulars you can, sir?"

"Well, it seems that Mr. Jules Schlossberg, a diamond merchant here, dissolved partnership with the firm of which he was a member, intending to go to Denver and begin business there, for himself."

"He was a bachelor and lived at the hotel, and the settlement of the dissolution of partnership was only made yesterday, when he got his share of the jewels on hand, and drew out of the bank the money he had deposited there."

"It was late when he came up-town, so he locked his money and treasure in his trunk, not intending to leave his rooms, and had his dinner sent up to him."

"He intended, his late partner said, to go to the Express office this morning, and send his valuables through to Denver."

"All that is known now is that his partner called for him this morning, and going up to his room he was discovered lying dead upon his bed, and his room had been rifled of all that was valuable."

"He had been dead many hours, the doctor said, and the cause of death was a knife-thrust in his heart."

"But no sound of a scuffle was heard, and nothing more is known."

"No one called for him during the evening?"

"No one, the clerk on duty said," responded Sherman Canfield.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TELL-TALE DIAMOND.

NAT smiled in a way which convinced Sherman Canfield that the young chief of the Unknown Ferrets knew more about the murder than any one else had thus far discovered, and he said:

"I am sure, Nat, that you have some clue."

"A diamond merchant you said the gentleman was, sir?"

"Yes."

"His name was Jules Schlossberg?"

"Yes."

"Is that his card?" and Nat threw a card upon the table.

"It certainly is, for his own name and that of his firm is here."

"On this paper you will see, Mr. Canfield, some figuring and a few words."

Nat handed over a slip of paper, and Sherman Canfield read aloud:

"Jewels valued at . . . \$35,000.00
Cash from Bank . . . 30,000.00"

Looking at Nat, Sherman Canfield remarked:

"That is the value of the gems his partner says that he carried from the store, and from there he went to the bank to draw his share of profits, which was thirty thousand dollars."

"Yes, sir; but did the chief ask the partner if he could recall just who was in the store yesterday?"

He did ask him, and he spoke of several, but of one man who, he said, was purchasing a diamond from the clerk while the two, himself and Mr. Schlossberg, were figuring up their accounts."

"In a private office?"

"No, in the rear of the store."

"The purchaser could hear them?"

"He thought so, and was a little suspicious of him, as he was so long in making a purchase, but did so at last and went out just ahead of Mr. Schlossberg."

"Did he describe him, sir?"

"Yes, and the chief wrote the description down."

Sherman Canfield then described the man, as the partner remembered him, and Nat said:

"Mr. Canfield I know the man!"

"Who was he?"

"The man registered on the hotel books as Daniel Starbuck, sir."

"You are sure?"

"From the description, yes, sir."

"And he is gone?"

"But not forgotten," significantly responded Nat.

"And you regard him as the murderer of Mr. Schlossberg?"

"No, sir."

"What then?"

"The accomplice."

"This is your surmise?"

"No, sir, it is a fact."

"Then you have proof?"

"Just that," and Nat placed a diamond upon the table before Canfield.

"Ah! this is a diamond, and a fine stone, worth all of three hundred dollars."

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you get it?"

"I picked it up from the floor in Starbuck's room at the hotel, and this card and slip of paper were there also, sir."

"Then you have proof that Starbuck is the murderer?"

"The accomplice, for his room communicated with that of his pal, who was registered as the Reverend Doctor Van Elliott, and the latter is the murderer, for he is the one I told you was the King of the Gallows."

"Aha! and they are gone?"

"And, as I said, not forgotten, sir, for I shall be on their trail sooner than they suspect."

"In fact, Mr. Canfield, that man Vance Vertner, alias Van Elliott, is a bold, bad criminal, and has plotted and planned well."

"He came to New York to rob some rich man. In some way he got hold of Schlossberg and dogged him to his death, getting at one swipe sixty-five thousand dollars, for those gems were of course put at cost value."

"He may have secured more, but that much we are sure of."

"He is a big money-robber, and a killer to gain his ends, and he plans too well to be caught, he thinks."

"Now, he was met by Dunning, and recognized, as I told you. He took him in as

an accomplice, for no thief likes to work alone."

"Coming to the hotel as a pretended clergyman, no one would suspect him, and he and Dunning have shadowed their man well and dogged him to his death."

"Now, the tell tale diamond, the card and slip of paper found in their room, connects them with the murder, and cautious as they were, and as clever, they yet left tell-tale evidence of guilt behind them in dropping that diamond, and not destroying the card and paper."

"Yes, Nat, had they been found and reported, they would have been a clue."

"Sure, sir, if the chambermaid did not first destroy the card and paper, and afterward find the diamond, and say nothing about it."

"Fortunately, I was the finder, and with tell tale evidence of just who the guilty ones are, I shall take their trail for of course the Reverend Van Elliott and Mr. Starbuck can be tracked, where Vertner and Dunning could not."

"I will at once go to work, and report to you to-night," and Nat hastily started upon his return to the hotel.

CHAPTER XII.

A FAIR FERRET ON THE SCENT.

WHEN New York Nat returned to the hotel he saw that the murder had still been kept a secret from the public.

The Secret Service chief had requested that nothing should be told of it until he had been able to get his men to work, for publicity frequently destroyed all hope of catching the criminal.

Going to his room, Nat found there his faithful pard Keno, who had been with him on many a perilous trail.

"I have been waiting for you, Nat, as both Flip and Foxey gave me the tip as to where I would find you."

"Yes, Keno, and I am glad to find you, for there is something more important up just now than shadowing my Double."

"Any of the boys can do that, but I need you for bigger game."

"I'm with you, cap'n; but you certainly have got a Double."

"You saw him, then?"

"You bet I saw him, and if I saw both of you together, I would not be able to pick you out without taking a good look."

"Have you found out anything about him?"

"No more than that he left the hotel this morning, and I followed him."

"Flip told me you were chasing him."

"I saw him take a cab and I did ditto."

"He stopped at the St. James Hotel, dismissed his cab, as I thought, passed out through the door on the side street, then met his cab again and was off."

"I had let my cab go, so I was caught, for before I could get another he was gone."

"I guess he's clever, Keno."

"You bet he is, if he looks like you."

"All I could do was to return to the hotel here and wait for you."

"Now what is to be done?"

"There was a murder committed here last night."

"So Foxey told me."

"A Mr. Schlossberg was killed in his room, robbed of thirty-five thousand dollars' worth of diamonds, and thirty thousand in cash, perhaps more, and no clue is known to the murderers."

"That is bad; but we have had just as bad cases before."

"Yes, far worse. I know who the murderers are."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Just like you."

"They were two men I was shadowing

here, only they acted far more rapidly than I supposed they would."

"They were too quick for me to save their victim, for I hardly expected such a crime at their hands, though I was looking for a robbery."

"Now the detectives have no clue, and I have, so we must run the men down."

"There are rewards out for them now, for former crimes, and one of them is the King of the Gallows."

"There will be other rewards for them now," said Keno.

"Yes, and the grist all comes to our mill."

"Now you go and look Foxey and Flip up and tell them to come here, and you also come back, but mind, no one must see you come in."

"I understand."

"Just leave the door unlocked; but there is some one in the next room."

"Yes, I know who it is," answered Nat, and as Keno left the room he went to the door and tapped gently.

"Come in," said a voice, and entering Nat slightly started as he saw, not Olive, in the disguise of an old lady, but a young girl dressed as a lady's maid, with cap and apron.

"Ah! Olive, you startled me at first."

"I'm Mrs. Olive Chandler's maid just now, Nat, for by mingling with the servants I knew I could find out more about this mysterious murder."

"And what did you discover?"

"That the gentleman's name was Jules Schlossberg, and he was a diamond merchant."

"It is supposed he had a great deal of money in his room, and he has lived at the hotel for over a year and everybody liked him."

"He was killed in bed, by a knife thrust in his heart, and the murderer evidently had a key that fitted his door and his trunks, for the keys of the latter were in his pocket."

"His diamond ring, shirt studs, watch and chain and sleeve buttons were not touched, though they were worth all of two thousand dollars, only what money he had and loose gems."

"The door was locked, and the murder was evidently committed before midnight, but by whom no one can guess, and the hotel servants are told not to breathe a word about it under penalty of dismissal, and they are all terribly scared."

"But, Nat, they are all being watched and there are a dozen detectives now in the hotel, so be very careful what you do."

"I have seen the boys, Foxey, Keno and Flip, but they did not know me, of course. They are all right, and no one would suspect them as Ferrets."

"Well, Olive, you have done well, and given me information I wanted, so now I'll tell you what I know," said Nat.

CHAPTER XIII.

NAT'S CHINEE FERRETS.

WHEN New York Nat had told Olive what he knew about the murder, he went on to say:

"Now, Olive, I want you to remain here for a few days as Mrs. Olivia Chandler and her maid, and find out all you can about this murder."

"You have other disguises with you, so keep an eye on my Double as well."

"All right, Nat."

"I will leave Flip in the hotel, also, and tell him he can communicate with you twice a day, but always wear your old lady disguise, or a veil for although I would trust any of our band of Boy Police with my life, I still stick to my determination that none of them shall know you as you are, none see your face undisguised to recognize it at some

future day when you are no longer the Mascot Queen of the Ferrets."

"They shall never know me as I am in reality, Nat."

"That is right, and though Flip will know you as the Mascot, let him only see you as an old lady."

"I will."

"Keno and Foxey I shall need with me, for I am going to the home of Vance Vertner and Star Dunning and get their real record, so as to start on their trail from the beginning, and Keno will work up the case here, while Foxey goes to Chicago to find out just what Vertner did there when he was robbing people under the guise of a physician."

"I shall also put several of the boys, who suspect nothing of the men, to find out just where the pretended parson and his friend went upon leaving this hotel, and where they are now located."

"Then I am sure, Nat, you will find them."

"But, do you know, this Double of yours worries me greatly," remarked Olive.

"It need not do so, sis, for I have no fear of him, and will soon throw him off the track, though I confess to being curious as to who he is; but both you and Flip can place him, I guess."

"I hope so, brother," answered Olive, and soon after Nat left the room, watched his chance and slipped into his room from the corridor.

He found Flip and Keno there, and a few moments after Foxey entered.

"Good! We are all here, and our Mascot Queen is also in the house, for I thought it best to have her aid."

"Her room is number one hundred, Flip, and you are to report there to her twice a day, and do all you can to unmask my Double, while at the same time picking up bits of information upon the murder."

"To-morrow the papers will have the story, and you may be sure that the reporters, brainy, shrewd fellows, will, as they always do, accomplish some good detective work that may aid us."

"For you, Keno, I have some work here to do in the city, while Foxey goes to Chicago to hunt up the record of a man there, and I go to start further back upon his career as a boy."

"Now, we will get down to business," and New York Nat gave minute instructions to each one of his three young ferrets, and started them off upon their missions.

Then he saw Olive once more, and with one of his grip-sacks in hand he went down to the office to settle his individual bill, telling the clerk he would be back again in a few days, and to care well for "Mrs. Chandler."

Taking a cab, he drove to a news stand down-town, and there found a bright-looking youth, his face freckled like a turkey egg.

While looking over the magazines on the stand, Nat said quietly to the youth:

"Freckles, I have work for you. Come up to the Rookery this afternoon and I'll tell you what you are to do, and Teaser, Blow and several others of the band are to help you."

"Yes, Captain Nat; I'll be there," responded Freckles, in the same low tone in which Nat had spoken.

Returning to his cab, Nat drove to a Chinese laundry on Fourteenth street, near Fourth avenue, and entering found two smooth-faced Chinamen at work there.

They smiled pleasantly as he entered and greeted them, and then asked:

"Well, Loo Choo, how are you and Wing Lung, and how is business?"

"Allee lightee well, business allee samee good."

"Like New Lork wellee muchee," Wing Lung answered.

"I am glad of it, and I am glad I brought

you back with me when I went on my Wild West trail, and in which you rendered me such valuable aid."

"Now I have some work for you to do."

"Allee lightee; me work good for you," with a broad smile on his celestial visage.

"You must get about among the crooks, as you do washing for that class of men, and pick up all that is said of a murder at a hotel last night, and which the papers will give a full account of to-morrow."

"Just see if you can pick up any clue as to who did the killing, and, in fact, all that you can, and let me know when I come in again."

"Allee lightee," answered the two Chinamen together! They seemed much pleased to have Nat give them the work to do, for they had become members of his band and good Ferrets they were too.

Then Nat drove to see Sherman Canfield, and told him all that had been done up to that time, and what he had planned to do; after which he asked him if there had been any discoveries, by the police or Headquarters detectives.

"None, Nat; they are all at sea, for they cannot fasten upon the slightest clue as to the murderers."

"They have suspected guests in the house, then the porter, the bell-boys, and even chambermaids, and are watching all."

"They have also held suspicion against the partner of Mr. Schlossberg, but as yet have not been able to find any evidence strong enough to arrest any one."

"All right; the Boy Ferrets have the clue and will run the real murderers down."

"But, Mr. Canfield, my sister Olive is at the hotel, and known as Mrs. Olivia Chandler, and I wish you would drop in and see the old lady, and compare notes with her."

"Flip is also there, playing the part of a dude. You know him, so he might be of service if you make any discovery, for he is trying to track my Double."

"Now, sir, I must be off, and I tell you I am determined to find Vance Vertner, for my delay in arresting him caused Mr. Schlossberg's death."

CHAPTER XIV.

A GUILTY CONSCIENCE.

NAT had been several days "working" the town where Vance Vertner, Star Dunning and Bernard Gaston had lived in boyhood and early manhood.

He had secretly learned the whole story of the bank robbery and murder of the watchman, the trial of Bernard Gaston, sentence to the gallows, and his rescue by his devoted wife, Sybil.

He had also heard of how Vance Vertner had afterward been convicted and sentenced, and ascertained the record of Star Dunning as well.

What had become of Bernard Gaston and his wife no one knew, but the gallows-eluding record of Vance Vertner all knew. What his fate and that of Star Dunning had been was a mystery, though old citizens in the town were willing to take oath that he would yet be heard of again.

Nat jotted down every item he had of the three men, and of the faithful wife, for the records of the five were to be his foundation for working up to their capture.

He left nothing undone, and was well pleased with his work, though it had taken him some days longer than he had anticipated.

The New York papers had been full of the story of the murder at the hotel, but Nat had noted with pleasure that no clue had been found, and the city detectives and police seemed to be working upon the wrong trail.

There was one discovery that Nat made which he determined to act upon.

This was that Vertner, Gaston and Dun-

ning had a particular chum in the town who had also been under suspicion of being an accomplice in the bank robbery and murder of the watchman.

He had been arrested, and then set free, as no proof could be obtained against him; but since then he had lived under a cloud.

His mother, it was said, had left him quite a sum of money, and on that he lived an idle life; but Nat heard it whispered by knowing ones that he had run through with his mother's fortune before she died, and could not have been left sufficient to live as he did.

It was also said that he was to marry a beautiful and rich girl of the town, a late resident to the place, and who, though warned against him would not give him up.

Having completed his Secret Service work Nat decided to pay this man a visit at his home in the suburbs of the town, and where he lived alone with only two old servants who had long been in the family.

"It is a stormy night, the very one on which to carry out my plan, and we can catch the midnight train," said Nat to himself.

So he paid his hotel bill, got his luggage and ordering a carriage drove to the home of Sidney Seldon, the man who lived under a cloud.

He found him at home, pacing to and fro in the hallway of his really pleasant home, and he opened the door at Nat's ring.

"Mr. Seldon, I believe?" said Nat.

"Yes, but I do not know you," was the almost surly response.

"You soon will, Mr. Seldon, when I tell you that I come from an old friend."

"Who, for instance?"

"Is there any one near to hear what I may say, for it is dangerous to mention some names in this town?"

Nat saw the man start at his words, then turn and glance toward a rear room, and in a low tone he said:

"Come into the library."

When he had closed the door he completed his sentence with:

"But I cannot understand what names you mean."

"The names of Vance Vertner and Star Dunning," abruptly said Nat.

He had fired a center shot for a purpose, and saw it strike, for Sidney Seldon started, his face grew livid and his lips quivered and he bit them nervously before he replied:

"What have I to do with those criminals?"

"They seemed to feel that you were still their friend," said Nat, at a venture.

"No, I do not claim friendship with murderers and thieves."

Nat was studying his man, reading him like a book, and replied:

"I have no proof, Mr. Seldon, that you are their friend, other than that they sent me to you to request that you come to New York with me and, by doing certain work, share in what will be the result to you, to them and myself."

"Who are you?"

"One who is devoted to their interest, and know the whole story of the bank robbery, murder and other crimes committed and for which they are now hiding from the gallows, while you are free, and—"

"My God! don't bring up that hideous nightmare to me, for I have tried to live it down, to forget it, and they were accused fools to let another know the deadly secrets of the past," cried the man excitedly.

"His conscience has betrayed him," muttered Nat.

CHAPTER XV.

NAT SOLVES A MYSTERY.

NAT was sure of his man. His conscience had betrayed him, after all these years.

Whatever proof had been lacking at the

trial of Vertner and Dunning, to connect Sidney Seldon with the murder and robbery, the guilty conscience of the man had betrayed him as one of the accomplices of that crime, and Nat made up his mind that perhaps he had been the main mover in the affair.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Seldon, you must control yourself better, for if I had been a detective your emotion and alarm would have caused me to feel suspicious of you."

"I know I was a fool; but after all these years and just when the cloud on my past was seemingly passing away, and I looked forward to some happiness in the future, your coming here and bringing it all up unnerved me."

"But you say you come from Vertner and Dunning?"

"Yes, we are all anxious to have you in the game that is to be played."

"I will do nothing more in the way of criminal acts."

"Have you not gone too far into the mire to retreat now, Mr. Seldon?"

"No, the past is buried with me."

"I was guilty, yes, as there is no use of disguising from you who have been told the whole story I see:

"But they did not fasten the guilt upon me at the trial, and so I was cleared, and have since tried hard to live down the cloud it put upon me."

"My compact with Vertner and Dunning I kept, as, for their swearing to my innocence, I was able to aid in their rescue, saving the former from the gallows, and the latter from ten years' imprisonment."

"Of course, had I not been cleared I know that I would have been sentenced to the gallows also, but for their saving me I saved them, so why should they wish to drag me again into crime?"

"It is from no desire to drag you into crime, but because they feel gratitude to you for saving them, that they wish to give you a share in what they will get."

"I am not rich, for what I then got is almost gone; but I will take no more risks for riches, especially as before long I shall marry an heiress—ah! I should not have said this, as I suppose if luck goes against them, I will have to come down with the cash to help them."

"Yes, I suppose they would call on you under the circumstances of your getting rich, for they do not think you have much now; but I will not mention to them what you have said."

"Do not do so, and I will do the right thing by you some time in your need."

"I thank you, Mr. Seldon; but what have you heard of Bernard Gaston, Vance wished me to ask you?"

"Nothing, since his noble wife aided him to escape from prison!"

"Vance, who was in love with Sybil Gaston, you know, wanted me to let him hang, when I said I would aid his escape also, because, as you may know, he was the scapegoat in the whole affair, and I did wish to save him."

"But Vance said no, and lo, he escapes through the plotting of his wife, and has never been heard from since, poor fellow."

"They have no clue to his whereabouts?"

"It is well they have not, for Vance Vertner still loves Gaston's wife and wants him out of the way, and from his record since he left here he would kill him, I am sure, for I see that he has run a wonderful career of crime under various aliases, and his escapes from hanging have gained him the name of the King of the Gallows."

"Yes, and he well deserves the name, but he wants to find Gaston to let him in on this deal."

"Don't you believe it, for he knows well that Bernard Gaston was not a criminal and never will be; that he was the victim of our deed, and sometimes the pressure has been

great upon me to make a clean breast of it."

"Don't do that; but do you not know how Gaston can be found?"

"No, unless his sister, a widow, living in New York may know."

"She was devoted to him, and it was said, aided his wife in his service, and she may know, but would not tell."

"Well, I won't find him for Vertner; but you will not return with me, you say?"

"No, simply tell Vertner and Dunning that I am living down that deed of ours, and wish to be let alone; but of course, if they are in trouble any time, I will be willing to help them."

"And tell them to let poor Bernard Gaston alone, wherever he may be."

Nat talked half an hour longer with Sidney Seldon, and then bidding him goodbye returned to his waiting cab, and drove back to the hotel, musing:

"Well, that was the cleverest act of my career, for at a venture, I did that which got the whole story."

"Now to find out who Gaston's sister is, and her address in New York, and then back to the city on the midnight train."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RETURN OF THE FERRET CHIEF.

NAT took the midnight train, and as he was waiting for it, he saw the train roll in that came up from the city.

To his amazement, he beheld a person step off whose appearance fairly startled him.

"My Double, by all that's holy, and he is on my track!" cried New York Nat excitedly, as for once he lost his calm manner.

"There I am, form, face and dress."

"But, thank goodness, he does not see me, for he certainly has come here to shadow me. His coming is no accident, no coincidence—ha! there is Flip shadowing him, for I know the boy in spite of his disguise."

Nat's Double had passed out to a hotel omnibus and entered it, and Nat saw the cunning Ferret Flip do the same.

Nat would have liked a word with Flip, but dared not attempt it, so at once went to his train and was soon rolling rapidly back to New York.

But seeing his Double, almost face to face, and feeling assured that he was on his track, disturbed him considerably.

"I wonder if he will meet Sidney Seldon on the street to-morrow and be taken for me."

"I guess, as he will not appear to recognize him, should they meet, Seldon will think it best to do the same—at least I hope so."

So mused Nat, and then he turned over in his sleeping berth and was soon fast asleep.

He arrived in New York in time for breakfast and went at once to the hotel.

"Ah! Mr. Norton, glad to see you back again, and you will find your mother all right," said the clerk.

"And how is my Double?" asked Nat as he registered again as Nathaniel Norton.

"Your Double has been here ever since you left, but departed last night for a run up home, he said, for a few days."

"Do you know he asked about you last night?"

"About me?"

"Yes, his Double and namesake."

"What did he say?"

"Well, he said he wanted to meet you, as the resemblance between you was so great that it was complicating matters."

"So he was anxious to find you, and asked where you were, where you had gone and when, and soon after he departed."

"Well, I am back for a day only, and if he returns tell him I am anxious to see him and to leave me an address where I can call on him when I come to the city again."

"You give me the same room, I hope?"

"Yes, the one opening into your mother's parlor."

"Thank you," and Nat went up to his room.

A tap at the door opening into the parlor adjoining, caused it to be opened by Olive in her disguise of an old lady.

She welcomed Nat most affectionately, and then said:

"Sit down, now, and I'll tell you all that has happened."

"First let me tell you that I have seen my Double."

"He has gone away somewhere, but Flip is on his track, in a different disguise from that he wore here."

"Yes, I saw Flip shadowing him and recognized him; but Olive, that man looks just as I appear to myself in a full length mirror."

"At a glance, yes, but he will not bear inspection, Nat, for I sat near him at dinner and watched him closely."

"His shoulders slant and are not broad like yours, his eyes are not the same color, and his face is wicked, I think, rather than good, while his hands and feet are large, not small and shapely as yours are."

"You certainly are complimentary to me, Olive; but are you not certain he is shadowing me?"

"Yes, for he looked every where for you when you left, and Flip heard him questioning the driver that took you to the depot, and he departed yesterday."

"Flip heard him tell the driver to call for him for the four o'clock train, and so he disguised himself to go with him, and, as my maid, I went to the depot and saw him question the ticket-seller about some one he resembled, and then buy a ticket for S—."

"Yes, I left him there last night, and Flip is after him."

"Now about the murder case?"

"It is about as when you left."

"Of course the papers were full of it, some with garbled statements, but they all attack the detectives for not finding the murderer."

"And they can never find them, for they suspect the wrong parties, suspicion never once falling upon the pretended Reverend Van Elliott and his friend Starbuck."

"No, they have Mr. Schlossberg's former partner, Ormann Goldsmidt under watch, detectives dodging him constantly," said Olive.

"Well, he may be an accomplice, but I doubt it, and believe those two friends who stopped here are alone guilty."

"But now, Olive, I have other work for you, and Mrs. Olivia Chandler and her maid must leave the hotel to-day, as also will Nathaniel Norton, for I have made some valuable discoveries while away."

CHAPTER XVII.

UNDER SUSPICION.

HAVING told Olive just what discoveries he had made, New York Nat continued:

"Now, as you tell me that Keno has struck the trail of the two men we want, I expect I will have to go away, especially as Foxey writes from Chicago that he also has struck a trail he wishes me to investigate."

"Yes, Nat, the coil is closing upon the necks of those men, thanks to your skillful planning."

"And the aid of the Mascot Queen and my glorious Boy Ferrets."

"But, here is the address of Bernard Gaston's sister. She is a widow, and her name is Mrs. Martha Marsden. She lives in fairly good circumstances, I hear, and owns her home, but takes a few boarders to aid in a living and to educate her children."

"She is the only one who knows where

her brother, Bernard Gaston, can be found, and of course she keeps it as a dark secret, for his neck has a rope about it you know, though from Seldon's confession he was a victim, not a criminal, and Vance Vertner is the arch fiend of that whole plot.

"Now I want you to go there and get board if you can."

"Yes, but suppose she has no room?"

"Then get day board, for you must make her acquaintance, win her confidence and friendship."

"Give Mr. Canfield as a reference, if she wants any, and give her to understand that you are an artist, for you really are, and can take with you your portfolio of sketches."

"Lead her to think you are studying in the studios, and keep a watch upon all she does, for her brother may be in this city for all we know."

"Especially watch the letters she receives and sends away, for you must find her brother."

"I will, Nat, and will go there as I am, asking for board for my young niece Miss Olive Chandler, whom I cannot accommodate as I live too far away."

"The very thing, and you can arrange for your niece, yourself, and see just how the land lays."

"I'll trust in you every time, Olive, and we will prove her brother a victim of wrong, not the gallows-hunted criminal he is accused of being."

"Now go and find out what you can do there, and meet me here in a couple of hours."

"Then I will have a carriage ready to take you up home, and drop me near the Rookery, for I will hold a council to-night of the band."

With this Nat left the room and pausing at the office said to the clerk that he wished he would make out his mother's and his bill up to after luncheon that day.

"We are sorry to lose you, Mr. Norton."

"Oh, I'll be back often; but my mother is very nervous over the murder in the hotel, and which I read about while I was away."

"Yes, wasn't it sad, for Mr. Schlossberg was a splendid man."

"Have they found no clue to the murderer?"

"Well, I think they have, but are keeping quiet until the police have their plans all arranged."

"It was too bold a crime for the guilty ones to hide themselves."

"So I think," and as Nat was going out the clerk called after him:

"What shall I do about your Double if he asks about you?"

"Say I will soon be back," and Nat passed on.

He went first to the laundry of Wing Lung and Woo Choo, and they greeted him cordially, but could give him no further information than to say that it was the general opinion of the New York crooks that Schlossberg's partner was guilty of the murder, for he was known to have a pass-key to his friend's rooms, which were taken by the year, and had often remained at the hotel all night as his guest.

They had had a difference of some kind, about Schlossberg's drawing out of the firm, and yet it was said that they parted good friends, only the breaking of the partnership left Mr. Goldsmidt in a financially crippled condition.

This was the talk of the crooks, who were sure that no New York criminal had done the deed.

"Goldsmidt, he killee partner allee samee," said Wing Lung, while Loo Choo added:

"Crookee 'Melican man say so allee lightee."

Pondering in his mind the charges against Ormann Goldsmidt, Nat left the laundry, after telling the two Celestial Ferrets to come

to the meeting that night, and wended his way to see Freckles, his new agent detective.

From what Freckles said, it seemed certain that Goldsmidt was the guilty man, in the eyes of the police, and he was being shadowed day and night, though not so as to cause suspicion that the detectives suspected.

"They have got hold of the wrong man, and if I do not find the real murderers Goldsmidt is liable to be hanged on circumstantial evidence," muttered Nat.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WHITE CARNATION.

NEW YORK NAT and Olive, as "Mrs. Chandler," drove away from the hotel, in a hack hired down-town by the Ferret, just as a cab drove up and the mysterious Double alighted from it.

"Oh, Nat, there he goes, arriving just as we are leaving."

"Yes, Olive, I see him, and we are just in time."

"If he can find me to-morrow, he is welcome to shadow me," answered Nat, and added:

"Now, tell me about your visit to Mrs. Marsden."

"Well, I found her a most estimable lady, and fortunately she had a large front room upon the second floor just vacated."

"I at once engaged it for my niece, and paid her a couple of weeks in advance, for I thought it best."

"Her room is the rear one, and she said if my niece did not mind the door could be opened between, for she and her little daughter roomed together, her son of twelve having the hall room next to hers."

"I told her my niece would prefer the door unlocked as a protection, and that she would arrive to-morrow, so I go there without having to disguise myself, Nat."

"No, better wear a wig, streaked with gray hair, and gold spectacles, and dress like a prim old maid, for I do not wish you seen as you are, Olive, while engaged in any Secret Service work."

"Your word is law, Sir Captain of the Unknown Ferrets, even to the Mascot Queen, and I obey, while after all it is best," answered Olive.

It was late when Olive was set down a couple of blocks from where her home was, in Mrs. Herbert's cottage on the Hudson River, and Nat carried the baggage.

Then they went on to the cottage, and Olive slipped up to her room without being seen in her disguises as an old woman, Nat going back in the cottage to see Mrs. Herbert, and talked to her until his sister could make a change.

Mrs. Herbert was a good woman, and loved Nat and Olive dearly, for the former had saved her two children from drowning, and thus won her heart.

Olive paid a good sum when she went there to board, and Nat paid for his meals by the week, whether he was there or not.

Mrs. Herbert could not but feel there was something mysterious in the conduct of the brother and sister, but she asked no questions, and took all that happened with perfect faith in them.

She owned her cottage, was a widow with two children, and did fancy work at home which gave her an income.

Olive was welcomed back warmly, after her absence, but was asked no questions, and after supper, she put on her flesh-like mask and veil, dressed in black and accompanied Nat to the Haunted House, the retreat of the Unknown Ferrets.

The band had arrived, and was in the assembly-room in force, and all rose and greeted the young chief and Mascot Queen.

Keno was there too, but Nat did not wish to hear his report before the band, so attend-

ed to the business on hand, for it was Saturday night.

The different young members made their reports, which Olive noted down as reported in the "Book of Doom," as the register of crimes was called.

The murder at the hotel was discussed, and each member was asked to tell what he had heard about it, Loo Choo and Wing Lung also marking down once more what they had already told Nat.

It seemed to be the opinion of one and all, from what they had gathered about the city, that Ormann Goldsmidt was the murderer, and the police would now fasten the crime upon him.

"I do not believe he is guilty, boys, and if I can prove it, as I hope to do before long, I will add to our bank account something over ten thousand dollars, perhaps more," said Nat.

"At present the Queen, who is our treasurer, reports a bank account of our own of twenty-nine thousand dollars, variously distributed in the different banks under fictitious names, and the chief of the Secret Service holds rewards we have won amounting to seventy-one thousand dollars, while cash in the treasury for daily use, foots up fifteen hundred, and our ally, Mr. Canfield, holds for us some thousands in rewards that passed through his hands."

"Now this is a big showing for our band of Boy Police of Unknown Ferrets, and if we keep on we will have a handsome sum to divide when we decide to come out and make ourselves known."

"This is pay-night, so the Queen will pay salaries, and the expense accounts you hand in to her of what you have spent in your work."

"Now let me make known to you that I have a Double, and he is shadowing me constantly."

"That some of you may not see him, and mistake him for me, let me tell you that when you see me without a disguise, I will wear a white pink flower in my buttonhole."

"Remember, no other flower but a white pink, and in addition I will carry this light cane—all look well at it, and do not address any one you believe to be me without seeing the white pink and this cane, while one and all of you keep a watch for my Double, and seeing him, track him to learn all about him."

"Now, boys, I am going away for a few days, but the Queen will be in command, and Freckles will act as captain for me."

"Foxy is in Chicago, and Keno will doubtless go with me."

With this the band was paid off and dismissed just as Flip entered the assembly room, and joined Nat, Olive and Keno, the latter having remained behind.

CHAPTER XIX.

PICKING UP CLUES.

FLIP's coming was most welcome, but he seemed amazed when New York Nat said:

"Well, Flip, you stuck to your man well up to S—and back again to the hotel."

"Do you know that I went to S—?"

"Yes, and arrived at midnight in the rain."

"My Double tried to find me there, but could not; found that I had left, so returned to New York and went again to the hotel."

"You know it all, captain," said Flip with a smile.

"I saw you, and got a look at my Double, too, for I left, as you arrived."

"I knew he was in good hands, so did not delay."

"Well, he was hot on your trail. He went to the hotels until he found where you had been, but had left."

"I feared that he was onto me, so

changed my rig to a country boy, as I had several disguises with me, and came back on the same train with him.

"He asked for you as he got to the hotel, and seemed all broken up when told 'you had just left with your mother.'"

"He registered, however, and so did I, and then I decided to wait and come to the council to-night."

"All right, Flip. I guess you had better fit yourself up with disguises galore, and still keep on his track, though I did think of taking you with me."

"Whatever you say, Captain Nat, is law to me."

"Well, you had better watch my Double, now that you have begun so well. Keno will be enough to go with me, this time."

"If you wish to report to the Queen, do so through Mr. Canfield, going there as a messenger-boy you know."

"Yes, I understand."

"Now the Queen will pay you your salary for the month, settle your expense account, and give you what money you will need to work on."

Flip drew his salary, settled up his expense account, and asked for what he needed in case of sudden demand, and then left the retreat.

"Now, Keno, what have you found out, for I did not care to ask you before the band?" said Nat.

"I found the hackman that took the two men to the ferry, and he says that one of them, the pretended parson, carried a sachel that he was most particular with."

"They crossed at the ferry to catch the Erie Road, and after a great deal of trouble and questioning, and giving out that I was in search of a minister who had left home in a demented frame of mind, I managed to find out from the ticket-seller that my two coves bought tickets to Chicago, and that the parson had his valuable sachel boxed up, valued heavily, and sent through by Express to Chicago."

"Good! we can trace them to the Express Office in Chicago at least, so get ready and we'll catch the midnight train, for we have time to do so."

"Meet me at the ferry sharp on time."

"I'll be there, Cap'n Nat, never fear," answered Keno, and with a bow to Olive he took his leave.

Then Nat selected from his stock in the retreat, several disguises, and departed with Olive, the dog guardian escorting them to the cellar door.

"I hope Tony comes daily to look after Sentinel," said Nat, referring to the dog.

"He says that he does, for I asked him to-night, and I guess he would not neglect him," was Olive's answer.

Escorting his sister to her home, and telling her to go early the next day to Mrs. Marsden's, and write him to an address in Chicago which he gave her, Nat bade her good-by and was soon on the Elevated Train rolling rapidly down to the ferry.

He found Keno there awaiting him, and also carrying a large grip, as Nat did, and crossing over the ferry with time to spare, they found that the same train hands went out that night that had made the run through when the two men they were tracking had departed.

"We will try and get on the same sleeper, so as to pump the porter," said Nat.

Inquiry soon made them acquainted with the car the two fugitives had traveled in, and by rare good luck they secured a section in it.

"That is what I call good luck," said Nat, as they entered the car and giving the porter a liberal fee which commanded his devoted services from the start.

When, thirty hours after, they arrived in Chicago, the conductor of the sleeper was richer by a box of cigars, and the porter by five dollars for having remembered all about

the parson and his friend, and New York Nat had picked up from the information thus gained, several clues to guide him in his future shadowing of the fugitives

CHAPTER XX.

FERRETS AFTER GAME.

URGED by the fees given them by New York Nat, it is strange how much the conductor and colored porter of the sleeping car remembered about the two passengers who had gone through with them two trips before to Chicago.

The conductor revealed what pleasant gentlemen they were, and said he had heard them talking about a trip to California and then around the world, after a few days' stay in Chicago.

As the conductor understood it he thought that Mr. Starbuck was a wealthy member of Mr. Van Elliott's church, and neither being in the best of health, the former was treating the parson to a trip of a few months.

The porter had overheard them mention the Grand Pacific Hotel as their abiding place upon reaching Chicago, and had overheard the parson say in a low tone:

"We must not delay many days in Chicago, as there is such a thing as risking too much."

Upon arriving in Chicago, the porter, who had carried the luggage of the two men to a hack, found the very driver to whose tender mercies he had left them, and he said that they had first ordered him to go to the Grand Pacific, but changed their intentions and he drove them to Leland's Hotel.

Going there, Nat found that they had been there for several days, and then had gone no one knew whither.

"We must send for Foxey," said Nat, and a messenger was at once dispatched to the address which Ferret Foxey had given as his stopping-place in the city.

It was not long before they arrived, and the three friends greeted each other warmly, and Foxey said:

"Well, I'll out with all I know, Cap'n Nat."

"Vertner was here as a physician, and he murdered and robbed a couple of his rich patients, so got found out and was sentenced to be hanged."

"He was known under an *alias* then, and after his escape from prison, and which was a most mysterious affair, he was found out to be Vance Vertner already twice under sentence to the gallows for murder."

"What became of him not a detective in this city knew. But it is reported here that he is dead, having been killed in a railway accident."

"I found one of his servants, a nurse girl, and after giving her a liberal fee, she put on her thinking-cap, and remembered that Vertner had owned a farm in Kansas, and at the trial this had not been spoken of, while he was known down in that country as Lucius Van Allen."

"It seems she was an investigator herself, and letters came for Mr. Lucius Van Allen every few weeks, which she saw her employer open, and one of the letters came open and she read it, and it was from the man in charge of the Kansas farm and was so worded that she knew the doctor, as she called Vertner, was the owner or was opening the letters of some one else."

"The reason that she did not give this in evidence at the trial, was, she said, because she was so rattled she did not know what she testified to."

"This is a connecting link, Keno, with the remark of the sleeping-car porter, who said the parson remarked that he would visit his Kansas farm before going to California, and added that no better retreat could be found, to which Starbuck had replied:

"Then let us stay there by all means until the storm blows over."

"Yes, I remember the porter telling you that he heard Vertner speak to his companion about his Kansas farm, and there I'll bet they are," responded Keno.

"Well, we must find out now just how they left this hotel, and where they went, so, Foxey, go and get your grip and return here, for you go with us."

The three ferrets set to work to still track their game, and they were not long in finding out that the fugitives had taken the hotel bus to the depot, and at once taking a hack they left the Leland, still on the hunt.

The driver was ordered to stop at the Adams Express office on the way, and inquiry of the superintendent revealed the fact that the Express box sent from New Jersey to Chicago had been taken out by the sender.

Arriving at the depot, after a good deal of questioning, the ticket-seller remembered the two men buying tickets to a Kansas town which he named.

Nat at once purchased three tickets for that point, and the trio of ferrets were soon being rapidly whirled westward.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FUGITIVES IN THEIR LAIR.

THE little town in Kansas was reached, and Nat and his comrades drove to the hotel and registered.

Nat told the landlord that he had an uncle living some twenty miles from that point, and had come out with his two companions to pay him a visit, adding:

"I believe my uncle always comes this far on the railroad and drives to his home from here, but I have lost the directions he sent me and must go by guess-work."

"What is your uncle's name, young man?" the landlord asked.

"Lucius Van Allen, sir."

"Why I know him, and he stopped here not two weeks ago, on his way home with a friend."

"He lives some forty miles from here, and hired a team of me to drive to the village half-way, where he intended to get another vehicle to carry them the balance of the way."

"He paid me six dollars for the team."

"Well, I'll give you the same amount to take us to the village," answered Nat, and it was arranged that they should start the next morning.

Nat looked at the name on the register and said:

"We are all right, boys, for those are the same hands that wrote the names of Van Elliott and Starbuck on the register of the New York Hotel."

"We are tracking our game to their lair."

The next morning the three Ferrets started on their journey in a buck-board which also carried their baggage, which consisted mostly of disguises and weapons to be used when needed.

They reached the village for dinner, and found it a small place of a hundred inhabitants, with a tavern, one store, a church, school-house and blacksmith shop.

After their driver had had his dinner and started back, Nat made inquiries as to whether horses could be purchased there, and the three were soon fitted out with four ponies, one being used as a pack-animal, and having found out the way they were to go, they rigged up as cowboys and started out the next morning to look for work, they said, as herders upon some of the ranches to the southward.

"Pards, we are in for it now, and must make a bold thing of it," said Nat.

"You bet we will, Cap'n Nat, for you and I have been on deadly trails before, and we'll show Foxey a thing or two," answered Keno.

"Foxey has been on deadly trails, too."

Keno, but not in the West; but we'll find him where he should be when we want him," replied Nat.

"If I am not, shoot me when you catch me," reminded Foxey.

"Now, boys, those two men are in hiding on the ranch until the papers stop talking of the Schlossberg murder and robbery.

"Vertner has evidently been in hiding there before, and took the ranch as a safe retreat, there being no railroad within forty miles.

"He is getting cautious as he grows older, and thinks it will be safer to lay by until he sees the result of the detectives' hunt for Schlossberg's murderer, and so he came here with Star Dunning to bide their time, and then get out of the country to enjoy the money they robbed their victim of, and dispose of the diamonds, which they dare not offer for sale in this country.

"Now, I was told that the ranches are scattered far apart as we go northward, and the Van Allen ranch is twenty miles from the village, and there are a number of cattle upon it and horses.

"This means that he must have a man in charge of it, and perhaps several herders, and they will naturally fight for their employer if he called upon them for aid, and we might have two to one against us, so we must go slow."

"You bet we must, Cap'n Nat, but we must get there all the same," said Keno.

"Oh, yes, we'll not know fail."

"If we do, it will be the first time the Unknown Ferrets have been downed," said Foxey.

"Now our plan must be," resumed New York Nat, "to go to the ranch, ask to remain all night, and say we are going down into Texas looking for work, where we can all be employed together.

"If Lucius Van Allen, as he is called, is short of herders, and will employ us, why we'll be right in line, and it will not be long before we have him on the way back to New York, with Star Dunning as his companion in irons.

"We can play the detectives well, and when we get further East can wire Mr. Canfield to meet us, and turn the prisoners over to him, so that we will not be known in the matter to any one, and still remain to the chief of the Secret Service the Unknown Ferrets.

"Now we will push on and see if luck comes our way, and once we get these men in the Tombs in New York, I'll see to it that their victim, Bernard Gaston, is found and proven innocent of the charge against him, and for which he is now hiding from the gallows.

"But the Mascot Queen will find him, rest assured."

Such was Nat's plot which his two brave young allies entered into with a will, and there was no flinching when at last the lair of the two fugitives came in sight across the prairie.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GIRL SHADOWER.

OLIVE, the Mascot Queen, drove to the house of Mrs. Martha Marsden, as had been arranged between herself and New York Nat, the morning after a room had been engaged for her by her alleged aunt.

She carried a trunk with her, an easel, portfolio and several small paintings.

Mrs. Marsden, a fine looking, but sad-faced lady, received her new guest with kindly manner and took her to her room.

Little dreaming that her guest was a fair detective, a spy upon her for a special purpose, she was at once drawn toward her new boarder, and it was not long before the two became most friendly.

Mrs. Marsden's children, a boy and girl, were also charmed with the artist boarder,

and when she left the table after dinner the four other boarders in the house pronounced her a delightful acquisition to their family circle.

Before a week had gone by the children fairly loved "Miss Olive," and Mrs. Marsden felt toward her as though she were an older daughter.

All this time the Girl Detective was studying the household, and seeing just what she could ferret out of family history.

One day while she was working in her room, making a painting of young Bernard Marsden, the mother came in and fairly started when she saw the hastily-painted likeness of her son.

"Ah! Miss Olive, I always thought my boy resembled his poor uncle, and your painting of him shows it most thoroughly.

"Why it really resembles my poor brother as he was at twenty more than it does my son."

"Why do you speak of him as your poor brother, Mrs. Marsden?" asked Olive, in a tone full of sympathy.

The tears came into the woman's eyes and she replied:

"Because he has been a poor, unfortunate man, hounded to death and accused of crimes he never was guilty of," said Mrs. Marsden, impassioned.

"Pardon me, but I meant not to cause you sorrow."

"You have not, for the sorrow is in my heart at all times.

"You are sympathetic and I will talk to you, for I have no one to talk to of him, and my children do not even know the truth.

"May I tell you of my brother, Miss Olive?"

"Certainly, I will gladly hear all you would say, and you have my sympathy beforehand."

"I know that, I feel it.

"My brother was the idol of our household, and grew up a splendid, noble man. He loved my best friend, Myrtle Gaynor, and won her from all rivals, and they were many.

"But there was one who never forgave him for winning Myrtle, and though he pretended friendship afterward, he was a snake in the grass.

"He bided his time and plotted my brother's ruin, for one day Bernard, who was a cashier of the bank in the town where we lived, was arrested as a murderer and a robber.

"It was proven, by circumstantial evidence wholly, that he had entered the bank at night, to rob it, of course, for he had met with financial losses of late, and the watchman surprising them, for there were others in the robbery, the poor fellow was killed.

"To declare his innocence was useless, for all pointed to his guilt, and so Bernard, the rival I referred to, and two others were tried and found guilty, my brother and his one time rival of murder and robbery, and one other as an accomplice, while the fourth was cleared for want of evidence.

"My brother and his rival were sentenced to the gallows, and the third one to imprisonment.

"Knowing his innocence, his noble wife plotted his escape, and she was successful, while surprising to relate, the other two escaped also from prison, and since have led a life of crime, I hear."

"And your brother?" asked Olive, in a low, kind tone.

"He is in hiding, under an assumed name, living an honorable life with his wife and two children, but alas! crushed under the cloud that is upon him.

"Here is a letter I have just received from him, and if you will permit me I will read it to you."

Olive showed no triumph in her face or voice as she replied:

"I will be glad to hear it," and she cast a

sly glance at the envelope and the letter, as Mrs. Marsden opened it before her.

While listening to the letter, too, the girl detective impressed upon her memory what was written upon the envelope: "If not delivered in five days, return to Miss Teresa Thurston."

The post-office address was also given, and though the envelope was addressed in a feminine hand, the letter was in a man's handwriting.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE QUEEN'S CLEVER WORK.

HAVING gotten from Mrs. Marsden just what she went to her house to secure, the address of the fugitive brother who was in hiding from the gallows, and the name under which he was hiding, or a part of it, at least, Olive began to look about for a means of giving up her room there.

She found the house and the people very pleasant, and had really become attached to Mrs. Marsden and her children.

But her home was not there; she had accomplished her purpose, and duty called her elsewhere.

So Olive made her plans to leave, and there were tears in Mrs. Marsden's eyes when she showed her a telegram that read:

"You must come home to your aunt at once, and her condition is such return prepared to remain."

"EUGENE GARTRELL, M.D."

Of course, this could only be understood as a call from Mrs. Olivia Chandler's physician for Olive to come to her aunt at once, and so Mrs. Marsden took it.

The girl detective hastily packed up, bade farewell to her new-found friends, and departed saying she would send an Express for her baggage.

She had gone but a few blocks from Mrs. Marsden's, when she was fairly startled at beholding, as she believed at first, none other than New York Nat.

But a closer look revealed that he wore no pink in his button-hole, and, though carrying a light cane, it was not the one Nat carried.

Then, too, Olive's keen eyes soon read the difference, startling as was the resemblance.

At once she determined to shadow the youth, whom she now knew as Nat's Double; but just then her eyes fell upon a messenger boy on the other side of the street.

"It is Flip, and he is shadowing, so I will leave it to him," she decided, and crossing the street she halted Flip with the words!

"I see you are after him, Flip, so bring word to me at the same hotel, where I will register as Mrs. Olivia Chandler."

She had held her face partly away, and her handkerchief up to her mouth, so with her spectacles and gray hair Flip had not been able to more than get a glance at her before she was gone.

It was the first time he had ever seen the Mascot Queen without a disguise; but, then, he had not seen enough to identify a single feature.

Going to a hack-stand, Olive sent a driver after her baggage, telling him to take it to the hotel where she had before stopped as Mrs. Chandler.

Then she took the Elevated train for her home, and disguising herself once more as Mrs. Olivia Chandler, she went to the hotel and secured the same rooms she had before, her baggage having already been delivered under her assumed name.

She had not been long in the room when a bell-boy knocked and said:

"A messenger to see you, ma'm."

It was Flip, and he entered and said quickly:

"He is stopping in the house, Queen, but may be off at any minute."

"Very well, come back here in an hour, Flip, and I may have news for you."

Flip departed, and Olive rung for a bell-boy and ordered:

"Go and find Mr. Norton. His room is one hundred and ten. Ask him to please come here."

A fee accompanied the request, the bell-boy went on the search and in twenty minutes returned and ushered New York Nat's Double into the room.

He seemed surprised at beholding an elderly lady, and said in an embarrassed way:

"Pardon me, but I think I have made a mistake."

"No, I sent for you. Sit down," and Olive stepped between her visitor and the door and continued:

"May I ask if your name is Norton?"

"Yes, madam, it is."

"You are from Connecticut?"

"I am attending college there," and the youth seemed ill at ease.

"May I ask what you are doing here in New York, dogging the steps of my son, instead of being at college?"

"Your son, madam?" and the youth grew more and more uneasy.

"Yes, my son, Nat Norton, who came to the city with me, and who has had you upon his track like a shadow every way he has turned—nay, you cannot leave, sir, for I am determined to know why you have been guilty of dogging my son. It is for you to say whether you will make a clean confession to me, or to the chief of the Secret Service, for I have you shadowed, your strange conduct demanding it. I can send you behind iron bars, and the touch on that bell will place you in the hands of waiting detectives."

Olive spoke in a low, impressive voice, while Nat's Double sunk into a chair, as though overcome.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DOUBLE UNMASKED.

For full a moment the Double did not speak.

He had dropped in a chair, as though at first overcome, but, after a minute or two, Olive saw that he was meditating. His face grew stern and his eyes brightened, as he said:

"My dear madam, as you have come into the question, it puts a different phase upon my conduct, which you seem to regard as being so wicked."

"I do not exactly understand you, sir," responded Olive, a trifle disconcerted by the reply of the Double.

"Permit me, madam, to explain, but in confidence, after I have asked you a question or two."

"Well, sir?" and, as Olive regarded her visitor more attentively, she saw that he had a strong face, but appeared several years older than she had at first believed.

"You are Mrs. Olivia Chandler, I believe?"

"Yes."

"And the young man registered here now and then as Nathaniel Norton is your son?"

"More strictly speaking my step-son."

"Did he ever attend Yale College?"

"Never."

"You can account for his movements for the past two years?"

"Perfectly, for we have never been separated save for very short periods of time."

"But it seems that you have turned questioner, not I."

"I said I would explain, Mrs. Chandler, if you would first answer several questions of mine—that I would explain, in confidence, remember."

"I shall so consider it, sir, and would now ask you why my son has been so persistently dogged by you, to such an extent, in fact,

that I have had to employ detectives to watch you?"

"Ah! I am sorry; but, the truth is, Mrs. Chandler, I guess I am on the wrong track; in fact, I now know I am, you being Nat Norton's mother."

"Then you have dogged him for a purpose which you will explain?"

"Willingly."

"The truth is, Mrs. Chandler, I am, as I said, a Yale student, and my parents, at their death, left me a large fortune. My guardian, for I am not yet twenty-one, allows me a large income."

"Two years ago, in Boston, I saw a youth whose resemblance to myself struck me as really startling."

"Addressing him I learned that he had no home, no kindred, was a waif and was working hard to educate himself and get up in the world."

"At once a fancy seized me to adopt him, especially as he said his name was Nat Norton, mine being Nick Norton."

"I took him to my hotel, fitted him up and we passed the summer together, he going to college with me when I entered Yale."

"From sheer mischief, I said he was my cousin, and the striking resemblance to me carried it out."

"To make a long story short, Mrs. Chandler, I was warming a viper to strike at me, for, after awhile, it became rumored about that there was a thief in the college."

"Investigation showed that it must be a student, for money was missing from rooms, articles of value were stolen, clothes were taken, and in fact hundreds of the students suffered losses."

"At last it came out, as I sent my Double, as he was called, to Boston to draw my allowance."

"He never returned; but, instead, wrote me—and, strange to say, his writing was a back hand, as mine is—that he had concluded to shift for himself; that he had improved much by his acquaintance with me and had managed to lay by several thousand dollars; and with booty enough to bring as much more, he would start business in another country."

"It was a stunning blow to me as you may guess. I wrote to my guardian and explained the situation, asking for money to pay all losses of the other students, by his thefts."

"I advertised in the college for all to state their losses of money, trinkets and clothing, and that I would pay them."

"I did do so, and hence cleared myself of his acts."

"But I vowed I would some day track him down, and flattering myself upon my detective talent, I read up on the subject, studied intricate cases and made up my mind, when I left Yale, to go on the search for the one who had so wronged me."

"Coming to New York on a visit, a short while since, I saw, as I believed, my Double."

"And more: I thought that he saw me and was watching me, hence I tried to throw him off my track and then in disguise shadow him."

"I saw that his handwriting was similar to mine, that his dress even was alike, and I then supposed he was trying to annoy me; so I determined to turn the tables and shadow him."

"I tracked him up to S—in this State, by finding the cabman who had driven him to the depot, and the ticket-seller told me he had sold a ticket to S—to my counterpart. But, he escaped me and returned here."

"Yes, he went to S—on important business of interest to me, and he has now gone West upon matters that I am interested in," informed Olive.

"Well, madam, you have my story, and it is simply a case of mistaken identity, which I am very sorry for, and I ask pardon for the annoyance I have caused you and your

son, and must look elsewhere for the one who so wronged me."

Olive held out her hand and said:

"I thank you, for this information. Some day I wish you to meet my son and become good friends. I am going to ask you to give me your permanent address, for I may wish to communicate with you."

The young man wrote down his address, and Olive gave him hers, in the care of Sherman Canfield, and they parted, the student saying:

"I will now return to college and bide my time to run down the scallawag who wronged me so."

"Well!" exclaimed Olive, when the door closed upon the student: "I have unmasked Nat's Double. It shows how one can be mistaken, for I thought he had a wicked face, when I did not know him, and now I think he is a noble fellow, and, yes, just as handsome as Nat."

"I must write Nat at once, and I certainly have news for him, but now, to leave the hotel and return to the cottage, as there is nothing more for me to do here."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TRAP SPRUNG.

As New York Nat and his two Ferret pards approached the ranch where their game had his lair under the name of Van Allen, they gazed with considerable interest upon it.

It was a large ranch, well inclosed with wire fencing, and a stream fringed with cottonwood and willows ran through it.

There were clumps of bushes here and there, good pasture lands, and upon a hill that commanded a view of miles around, was the house and the out-buildings, all in good order.

The house was a structure of hewn logs, stoutly built, large, and surrounded by broad piazzas."

There were extensive out-buildings, a large vegetable garden, and fields of corn fenced in, while a large number of horses, cattle, sheep and hogs were visible.

"Well, he has a fine place here, that is certain, has Mr. Vance Vertner, *alias* the Reverend Doctor Van Elliott, *alias* Mr. Lucius Van Allen, and whose most appropriate name is the King of the Gallows."

"Well, we'll see if he can escape the gallows this time," said Nat.

"If he is there?" suggested Keno.

"If he is not, we will track him to where he is."

"Some one is there, for I see two men on the piazza, and they are watching us," Foxey remarked.

"Yes, and we are watching them, for even at this distance I know my men."

"Now, boys, remember our plan, make no mistakes, keep cool, and the game is ours," said Nat.

In five minutes more the three Ferret pards rode into the gate in the fence inclosing the grounds about the house, and hitching their horses to the rack they dismounted and approached the two men seated upon the piazza, and who were eying them with the deepest interest.

"I knew I was not mistaken, for there is the King of the Gallows, and the other is his pard," whispered Nat.

"Pardon me, gents, but can we get to stay all night, as we've got a long trail before us?" asked Nat politely, and with a true western accent in his manner of speaking.

"I guess so; but, who are you, and where are you going?" asked the man whom Nat had said was the King of the Gallows, but who now had discarded his clerical suit for a rough garb suited to a ranch, as also had his companion.

"Well, we are three boys, Nat, Kit and

Fox, and we are done with schooling, so are going to Texas to be cowboys."

"Have you friends in Texas, any one that you are going to?"

"Not exactly, but we will git along."

"You need not go any further, if you want a job as herders, for I had a man and his family here; three of them boys, but they had a fortune left them, and leave me to-morrow, so I was going to get some help, and you are just in time."

Nothing could have been more fortunate, and Nat and his pards were given a cabin for themselves, and at once went to work learning what their duties were, under the tuition of the boys then on the place.

"I tell you, Star, we are in luck, for those boys happened along in the very nick of time, and though I must get an older and experienced man to be the head, they will do all right," said the King of the Gallows, when he returned from showing his herders their work.

"Then you wish to stay here for a while?"

"Yes, it is best, for I am a little anxious about that New York affair, for some reason, though I am not given to forebodings."

"We can push on down into Texas as cattle-herders, and thence into Mexico, where we will be able to roam about as gentlemen of leisure."

"And your ranch?"

"I'll let it remain under a good manager, for it will always be a safe retreat to come to, and is making money."

"All right; you lead and I follow," was the reply.

"Well, we'll go, and live as the best, until we have used up the money and calculated to get more, and then we'll plot for another big stake."

"I hope it can be done without murder."

"Bah! what is a life to take? By this time you should have no conscience, man."

The three Boy Ferrets passed the night quietly in their quarters, and the next morning the family who had long been in charge took their departure bag and baggage, to go and take possession of their inheritance in another part of the State.

"When you boys get broken in, I'll go off in search of a man to take full charge, for you are too young to have the management of the ranch," said the King of the Gallows the day after the departure of the family.

He had gone out to the quarters of the Ferrets at dinner-time, and was alone, and hardly had he uttered the words, when he found a revolver thrust into his face and, heard the words:

"Hands up, quick, Vance Vertner! You are at last run down!"

The man uttered a startled cry, and his face became livid.

For a moment he seemed about to spring upon Nat, in spite of the threatening revolver, but a glance on each side of him showed that the other two Ferrets covered him, and he said coolly:

"I submit against odds, and to let you see that you have mistaken your man."

"Oh, no! I know the King of the Gallows too well to mistake him, and as soon as we have you safe we will secure your pard in crime, Star Dunning."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ARREST.

THE King of the Gallows was very quickly ironed and gagged, after which he was secured in the cabin, and the three Ferrets went after their other game.

Star Dunning was asleep in the hammock on the piazza, when the cold muzzle of a revolver, pressed against his face, awoke him.

"We want you, pard, and, as the King is hobbled you need not force us to shoot you."

Nat's cool words awoke the man to a sense of his danger, and he was so completely unnerved that he made no resistance, so was soon in irons.

"Now, Foxey, I wish you to ride over to the two nearest ranches after we have gone, and explain that detectives came and arrested Lucius Van Allen and his friend for crimes committed in the East, and left you in charge of the ranch until the county officers could take control."

"Then you come East after us as quick as you can and catch us in Chicago, where I will telegraph Mr. Canfield to meet us."

"All right, Cap'n Nat."

"When do you start?" Foxey asked.

"At sunset; and we'll push through with a fine pair of horses to the buckboard, for a station on the railroad and catch the early morning train."

"But now we must find the boodle the Gallows King got away with."

A search of the cabin was not long in unearthing the casket of gems and the money taken from the murdered man in New York, and other booty was found also.

The best horses on the ranch were then hitched to the buck-board, the luggage thrown on, and the prisoners were made to get into the rear seat of the vehicle and were bound to it.

Nat took the reins, Keno got on the seat with him and Foxey called out:

"Good-by! I'll give the news in the morning, and join you in Chicago as soon as I can."

With this Nat drove away, the sun yet being an hour high, for they hoped to be able to catch a train that passed the station at midnight.

This they did, leaving their horses to be returned to the ranch, and taking the state-room of the sleeping car they soon had their prisoners safe in it.

Neither the King of the Gallows nor Star Dunning suspected that their captors were not legitimate detectives, young as they were, and had not the requisite papers for their arrest!

They were both dazed by the blow and crushed, and were as meek as lambs—hardened villains though they were.

Chicago was reached in the night, and a hack drove the four to Leland's Hotel, where they were soon roomed and Nat was reading the letters awaiting him.

He had sent a telegram to Sherman Canfield and read an answer which said:

"Have done as requested and start at once to meet you."

A letter from Olive, Nat read with pleasure, as it said:

"Have unmasked your Double. He is not dangerous."

"The story will keep to tell you, so I will not write."

"The address of the one you seek is on inclosed card, so you can see him."

Promptly on time Sherman Canfield arrived at the hotel, accompanied by two officers of the law.

He had been requested by Nat's telegram, to stop at S— and secure two officers to come on with him, for the Ferrets had thought it best to return the prisoners to the scene of their first crime.

So they were turned over to Sherman Canfield, who in turn gave them in charge of the officers, Nat and Keno not being known in the matter.

At the request of Nat, through Sherman Canfield, the officers delayed in Chicago several days, until the arrival of Foxey, for the young Ferret captain did not wish to have the prisoner arrive in S— before he did, as his motive was to see Sidney Seldon and give him the chance to turn State's evidence, and thus save himself, while clearing Bernard Gaston of the stain of crime he had so long borne.

Foxey turned up, in a couple of days, to say that he had left the ranch in safe hands until further instructions; whereupon Nat and his two pards, accompanied by Sherman Canfield, started East, twelve hours in advance of the officers and their prisoners.

Nat and Mr. Canfield stopped off at S—, while the two young ferrets went on to New York, and Sidney Seldon was surprised by another call from the one who had so startled him a short while before.

It did not take very long to explain just how the matter stood, and Sidney Seldon saw that he was cornered, so made a clean breast of it, and expressed his willingness to turn State's evidence, and thus go free himself.

Leaving Sherman Canfield there to arrange all, as he did not wish to be known in the affair, Nat took the first train on for New York.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

It was a startling surprise to the good people of S— when the two officers returned with Vance Vertner and Star Dunning as prisoners, and told how they had been run down by New York Secret Service men.

They also were amazed to hear that Sidney Seldon, soon to marry a lovely girl and an heiress, had confessed his story of crime!

They read his full confession of how Vance Vertner, seeking revenge upon Bernard Gaston, his successful rival, had plotted his downfall, and, with his, Seldon's, aid, and that of Star Dunning, they had made Gaston appear as the robber of the bank and the murderer of the watchman.

Bernard Gaston had sought to clear himself, and so they had been brought into it, with the result already known.

He, Seldon, had gotten the money taken from the bank, and so had been able to rescue Vertner from the gallows, and afterward had aided both him and Dunning.

That Bernard Gaston had not died on the gallows was owing to the devotion and cleverness of his lovely wife, for she had rescued him from the ignominious death with which he had been threatened.

What had become of Gaston, Seldon did not know. The confession he made saved him, but it sent him in disgrace away from S— and the girl he had hoped to win.

Her father placed in the hands of Sherman Canfield a check for five thousand dollars to be given the detectives for saving his daughter from such an alliance as she had escaped by their wonderful skill and courage.

Going to New York, Sherman Canfield first saw Nat and told him all; then he went to see the Secret Service chief, who heard the whole story with deepest interest, and remarked:

"Well, Canfield, you are just in time, for I was about to order the arrest of Goldsmidt, the partner of Schlossberg, as the latter's murderer."

"It shows just how we can hang an innocent man."

"So here are the gems intact, and the money they robbed poor Schlossberg of."

"Well, well! Your Unknown Ferrets are wonders, and grow in importance day by day."

"Of course they get the rewards, and deserve them, so I will put them with the other sums I hold for them."

"You are not ready yet to tell me the secret of who the Unknown Ferrets are?"

"Not yet, chief. Yet awhile the secret must be kept; but some day their leader will come in and make a clean breast of it, telling you his reasons for remaining so long unknown," replied Canfield.

Soon after he left the Headquarters, and returning to his home found New York Nat there awaiting him.

"Well, Nat, the chief knows all, and I was just in time to save poor Goldsmidt from arrest."

"I met him as I came up and told him the story, too. He was positively scared at his narrow escape, and says he wishes to do something handsome for the detectives who ran the murderer down, so you see you get it on all sides."

"Yes, sir; and now if you will go and call on Mrs. Marsden, and tell her all, you will do a great favor, for she can write the news to her brother, who has so long suffered as a guilty man."

"I will go at once, Nat."

"But it would be just as well not to let her know that Olive was a girl detective."

"Yes, that need not be told."

Sherman Canfield started away upon his mission, and the reader can picture the joy of Mrs. Marsden, and that of her unhappy brother when the truth became known, and he was no longer a hunted man.

There was rejoicing, too, in the band of Secret Ferrets at their success, and the money they had earned.

It greatly encouraged them to go on with the good work of running down the crooks, when even the King of the Gallows had been captured by their young leader, New York Nat.

THE END.

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